



Upgrade

How Would You Like This Life to Go?

Before the 1940s, this was an unheard of term. When I was young, it was almost never used in normal conversations. You may get a newer car or a bigger home, but no one ever said they upgraded them. Now though it is used in nearly every context. You upgrade your phone. Upgrade your house. Upgrade your career. People even talk about upgrading their marriages which generally means cheating on your spouse and marrying someone younger. Rather than getting a new TV, I upgrade it. I don't buy a better microwave; I upgrade my microwave. You don't go see a therapist to help you with your family issues, you go to upgrade your relationships. I am not certain though that all upgrades are created equal. Some upgrades can make your life worse. Is fast-food an upgrade? Are indoor exercise machines an upgrade? Are shopping malls an upgrade over the traditional downtown, are parking lots an upgrade over neighborhood parks? Yet who wants to complain about indoor plumbing or the eradication of the Bubonic plague? Some upgrades take time to evaluate. Is it really an improvement or a downgrade in one's life? James, the brother of Jesus in our passage does not use the term "upgrade" to describe what God does for you, but it certainly is the most incredible upgrade you will ever experience.

Notice what he has to say. **Don't be deceived, my dear brothers. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.** (James 1:16-18 NIV) James insists that it is possible to be deceived about what is happening in your life. He doesn't say who does the deceiving or the mechanism for it. He simply tells you to make sure you aren't being deceived about what he is going to tell you. There are two significant upgrades that come from God and perhaps you have experienced them. Before describing them, a critical point must be noted. God is never upgraded, improved, or made better. He is as James notes not changing like shifting shadows. He isn't learning new skills, improving His behavior, or figuring out things. He is not like a "shifting shadow" that depends on the sun's light or the spinning of the earth to determine His character or actions. God doesn't wake up some days with an "aha" experience where He suddenly "gets it". He certainly doesn't ever "grow up". We have a God who is perfect in every way every day and that does not change. You can count on Him when it comes to right and wrong, good and bad. He doesn't change because He sees things perfectly and gets it right all the time. God does not upgrade nor is He upgraded.

You however are scheduled for upgrades. James has this to say about your situation. **Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights...** What a fascinating statement this is. Every good and perfect gift is from above. Not some, not most but all of them. If they are good and perfect, then it is from God. There are two lovely words here to consider. The first is "agathe" and means good in the sense of virtuous or upright. It is good in the same way someone stops at the scene of an accident to help the victims is good. Good as you would describe the teacher who pours her soul into helping the children in her classroom. James is talking about the gifts that come to you that make you better, build your character and lead to a more joyful life. James also describes the gifts from God as "teleios". They are fully developed, mature, perfectly ripe. They come at just the right time when they are best for you. It's not like the riches someone who wins the lottery gains that ruin the person's life because she or he is not prepared

emotionally or psychologically for such new gained wealth. When God gives you His blessings, they are perfect for the moment and come just at the right point in your life when they can make you a better soul.

The second upgrade mentioned is what James calls your birth. **He chose to give us birth through the word of truth...**The term translated “chose” means to be inclined to do something, intending to do it. It is out of God’s own free will and desire that He gives us birth. It is not thrust upon Him, nor is He coerced to do it. God gives out birth because that is what He wants to do. What is this birth? It is what Jesus called being “born again”. It is salvation and all it entails. How do we know James is not talking about physical birth? It is because this birth is through the “word of truth”, the Gospel. This birth is a complete transformation that begins the moment you believe the word of truth that Jesus died to take your sin from you and that He alone gives you eternal life. As a result of this new birth, Christ becomes a part of your life, He is in fact joined to you so that you are made into someone completely new. **Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!** (2 Corinthians 5:17 NIV) By faith in Christ He comes and becomes a part of you! **I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.** (Ephesians 3: 16-17a NIV) Doing what God says to do is the way we show our real faith in Him and even our love for God. When that happens, the supernatural bond between us and Jesus Christ grows stronger and more profound. **Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.** (John 14:23 NIV)

There is so much to say about God giving us birth through the word of truth but let us conclude with this. The worst part of life is sin. It perverts and contaminates us in ways that, if we were not so immersed in it, would nauseate and humiliate us. Sin is the most destructive force there is. It creates world wars, child abuse, violence, hatred, and every form of evil. If Christ did not die to take our sin from us, there would be no birth, only death, loathsome and brutal death. But He was crucified for our sins and so we have hope beyond our imagination. The Apostle Paul describes in some detail what His sacrifice means for us. **If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.** (Romans 6:5-7 NIV) There you have a hint of what this birth brings. The eventual complete elimination of sin from us and from the world where we live.

Imagine a child who has suffered immeasurable cruelty at the hands of the adults who have custody of her. Beatings, cursings, malnourishment, horrible hygiene, locked up in a small, confined area for days on end. Suppose that child is suddenly removed from that home and now has parents who adore her, lavish her with love and provide her with a clean, comfortable home, tasty nutritious meals and bring joy and laughter to her life. What sort of transformed life would that be? Now consider what it is like to have all your sin taken out of you by Christ: no more craving for what is evil and wrong, joy in every moment, hope that tomorrow will be even better than today. More than that, Christ will be closer to you than your own mind and thoughts and He will fill your heart with wisdom and love and happiness. You cannot now fathom how it will be with Christ as your Savior because sin is so much dominating your life and the lives of all those around you. Your birth as a child of God is just the beginning of what is in store. Now you see partially. Soon your heart will be filled with more joy than you can imagine. Hang in there. You are who Jesus dreamed of having when He set out to save the world from its sin. You are the firstfruits of His New Creation.