

Focus on James 1:17–27

WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” Aaron L. Uitti

For a covenant community, which is not immune to heated disputes, James urges his readers to be quick to listen, slow to speak. James undoubtedly sat through assemblies where contention fractured the community. He observed that human anger will not produce results that make things right. James is intense, using acid rhetoric: “rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness,” he admonishes (v. 21). On the other hand, he says, listening and being listened to open the door to the righteousness of God for the community.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” Haruko Nawata Ward

In Greek philosophy, every being has its origin in the highest Being. This Being is also named the Source, Life, Light, Good, Truth, and Idea. Each being is placed in the hierarchy of beings, as on a ladder. Each receives energy from the Source above. If the being is closer to the top of the ladder, it receives and reflects brighter light; if the being ranks toward the bottom, it receives lesser light and stays shadowy. Calling the Christian God “Father of lights” (v. 17), the writer of James shows that every life-giving gift to Christians also comes from their Source. However, by stating “there is no variation or shadow due to change,” the writer departs from Greek cosmology. In the Christian universe, every Christian receives this gift equally and not according to his or her rank in the hierarchy. The supreme gift that Christians receive is “birth by the word of truth” (v. 18).

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” by
Archie Smith Jr.

James calls us to be responsible, taking seriously our emotional lives, our religious faith, and our behavior. We can envision ourselves as early signs of God’s new creation. We can begin by embracing the whole of ourselves and taking responsibility for our constructive and destructive potentials. Living this way can increase our critical discernment. It can foster the development of persons and communities. Such living, when joined by the faithfulness of many others, can become a strong current that helps to transform the world.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,”
Peter Rhea Jones

The reference to new birth signals a critical intention of a purposive God. One may draw this out in terms of a theology and ethic of divine giving (John 3:16), giving being at the heart of the universe. Generosity grounded in the character of God and embodied in the mission of Jesus can unfold as an influential model of the Divine. To be generous is consonant with the nature of God. God comes through as reliable as well (v. 17c), even from a cosmic perspective.