

Good And Perfect Gifts

James 1:16-18

16 Do not be deceived, (do not err) my beloved brothers. 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. 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. (James 1:16-18 (ESV))

As we study this Book of James, we'll continue to find that it is different in a number of ways from the other books in the Bible. One of those differing ways can be seen in the way that right along with giving instructions and guidance for those who are already maturing in their salvation, God also keeps going back and revisiting the first and most basic steps of salvation. And He does that here in this text for today.

Why does God do that? I have no doubt, it is because interspersed within every group of believers, there are some who really have not taken that final step of surrender to Christ, that very decisive step spoken about in John 1. Listen!

12 . . . to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. (John 1:12-13 (ESV))

Unfortunately, for every congregation, there are some who have grown up within the walls of their church, have spoken all the right words, and have enjoyed many of the privileges of being a part of the family of God, but are not truly a part of it, not truly "born again". And so, the message that James repeats to us over and over again in this Book, is one that urges us to "examine ourselves carefully and make sure that we truly are of the faith".

In the beginning words of this chapter, God speak to us about the testing of our faith, which assumes that we are already truly saved and that we are being chastened by the hand of God so as to strengthen and mature us in our beliefs. But as we read these words of today's text, we find that God is doing just as I mentioned a moment ago. He is again taking us back to the very basics of salvation.

If, as we study these words, we are already saved, we will grow in our faith. If we are not saved, then this "gospel" has the power to reach into our souls and to bring us to salvation. Those words again from Romans 1,

16 . . . I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth. (Romans 1:16 (KJV))

I never cease to be amazed at this truth, how God is able to put an inherent compelling power within certain words, words that when spoken or presented in any form, in preaching, or in songs, or in performances, there is a persuasive kind of attraction that emanates out from them, drawing people to Christ and to salvation. And that is exactly what takes place with the “Gospel”, the death, the burial and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And every time the Easter season is celebrated, the “gospel” is manifested, attracting and drawing people to Christ and to salvation.

Let me read again the words of our text, but I’ll begin with verse 13, because these verses are all tied together, leading to the main point that God is giving to us today, which is in verse 18. Follow along with me,

13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. 14 But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. 15 Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. (James 1:13-15 (ESV))

And then our text for today,

16 Do not be deceived, (do not err) my beloved brothers. 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. 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. (James 1:16-18 (ESV))

Note how these instructions have moved from the “testing of our faith”, and the asking for “wisdom from God”, which are instruction to maturing believers, on to these words that are more directed to those who do not yet know God as Savior and Lord.

Here, beginning in verse 16, we are being told that we must not be deceived and err in our beliefs and our thoughts about God, believing that He might possibly lead us down some errant path. God really cannot do that! He cannot Himself be tempted to do anything that is unholy or unrighteous, and He will never tempt any of us in the same way. He is ever and always holy and righteous. And He is trustworthy at all times and in every way.

And yes, there are times when God will lead us through occasions of trials and testing. But as we learned in Hebrews 12, God is our loving Father, who desires to chasten us and to train us up in the ways of righteousness. And His intentions and desires for us

are always “good” and always trustworthy. And so, He reminds us of that with this promise here in verse 17,

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.
(James 1:17 (ESV))

This is a reminder that you and I need to keep at the forefront of our thinking, that God is always, always “good” and everything that He brings to us and bestows upon us is good, that at the very core essence of who His is, His nature, His Spirit, and His character, God is Holy, He is Righteous and He is “good”.

In Psalm 119, verse 68, David sings out that refrain to us, saying

68 You are good, and do good; Teach me Your statutes. (Psalm 119:68 (NKJV))

Now, before we go further, may I pause and ask you the simple question, “Do you believe this”? “Do you really believe that God truly is always “good” and that everything He does is “good”,

I bring that question to you and me because belief that God is truly “good” is essential to our faith. It gains us nothing within our soul to profess that we believe in God, if we are not fully confident that “He truly is always good”. Why is that so? It is because if we do not believe that God is always good, in all that He is and all that He does, then as all of the many difficult matters and conditions of daily life begin to assault our senses, doubts and questions will surely begin to take their toll on our faith.

We know that to be true because it takes place within our own souls, even now. Too often, in times of stress and conflict, we find our thoughts and hopes being tossed about by waves of doubt, asking God “why”, and thinking thoughts like, “where were you God when I needed you to help me?”

But God wants to change us from being that kind of person, the one who is continually tossed about by “doubts”. Listen again to the words in verses 6 ,7 and 8.

6 . . . the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. 7 For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; 8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.
(James 1:6-8 (ESV))

God wants to transform you and me from this “up and down”, “doubting” and “wavering” soul into the one that He describes in verse 18. Listen!

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. (James 1:18 (ESV))

But may I mind us that with these words, God is taking us all the way back to the basics of salvation. And with these words, He is compelling us to consider again, “have we truly taken that final step of surrender into salvation”?

Here, God is describing for us the ultimate of the “good and perfect gifts” that He can bestow upon us. And note carefully in these words that He begins by making the clear declaration that all of this will come from Him and Him alone. Listen again! Verse 18,
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. (James 1:18 (ESV))

He clearly tells us here in these first words, that it is “Of His own Will”. Yes, somewhere in the whole transaction there is some “freewill” involved. And I don’t know exactly how it is intermixed, but I do know, from these very clear words, that our “freewill” is definitely not the thing that saves our mortal souls. That comes from God and God alone. It is “of His own Will” and His Will alone! Let me say it another way! The change that God wants to wrought within our souls is a completely sovereign act of His own Will.

Why is it necessary that it be that way? Please bear with me as I repeat some of the things that I have said to us over these past few week, but it’s necessary in order for us to be able to understand the words of this verse.

It is absolutely necessary for our salvation to be as verse 18 tells us, “Of His own Will”, because otherwise you and I would never be saved. Contrary to the errant doctrines of some of our fellow believers, these scriptures are clear and plain. While yes, we were created in the image of God and we have many of His attributes written upon our DNA. The ability to just make the decision ourselves that we will be saved, simply is not part of God’s endowments to us.

And there are many scriptures that tell us why. In Romans 3, God tells us,
10 As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; 11 there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. 12 All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."
(Romans 3:10-12 (NIV))

Note those words carefully! There is no one who is righteous, no one who understands, not one who seeks God, not even one.

And in Ephesians chapter 2, we're told why. It is because we are dead! Really dead! And dead people can't do anything. Turn there with me and follow along.

1 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience, 3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.
(Ephesians 2:1-3 (ESV))

Can this be any more clear? In our unsaved condition, we were dead, in every way, we just did not know it. And neither does any unbeliever, as they go about their daily routines of life. Unsaved and without Christ, I was dead, completely dead in my transgressions and sins. I followed the course of this world and I followed the prince of the power of the air, satan. And I was one of the "sons of disobedience", living in the sins of my flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind. And I was a child of wrath!

This is the "why" for these first words of James 1:18, "of His own Will". I could not, would not and did not even want to know God or to submit myself to Him. It truly had to be Him who reached His loving hand into my life and saved me.

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. (James 1:18 (ESV))

Folks, this is the Easter story. This is the "Gospel". This is how God wrought salvation within our souls. "Of His own Will, He brought us forth by the Word of Truth".

Here again also . . . as I read these words from the English Standard Version, some of the impact that other versions provide to us get left behind. In the King James Version, these words "brought forth" are translated "begat", which is a far better word. As it is defined in the Greek, the word "apokyeo" means to "begat", to literally "breed forth", and it bespeaks the whole process of being "born again". Recall those words from the Lord Jesus as He spoke to Nicodemus. He said,
3 . . ."Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John 3:3 (NASB))

And so it must be with you and me. Those words again from James 1:18, this time in the KJV.

18 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 (KJV))

And note again from these words that no part of this transaction of our salvation is of our own effort. When a child is being born, they are not participating with an act of their own freewill. A child is born solely by the compelling force of the one who is “begetting” them.

That is what is taking place within these words. There is a “compelling force” within the “Word of Truth”. As we hear the “Word of truth”, we are “drawn” in a compelling way to hear and to receive the truth that is being given to us. May I give us two scriptures that tell us this! First from John 6:44, Jesus said

44 No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. (John 6:44 (KJV))

And the “drawing” by the Father is no mere “wooing” and sweet talking. The dictionary defines “draw” as “pulled or dragged”. The Father’s “drawing” is a “compelling force”.

Secondly, in Romans 10, we read,

17 So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. (Romans 10:17 (KJV))

God the Father puts a compelling “draw” within our souls, and He does it through the hearing of the “Word of God”, the “Word of Truth”.

Here again is the “compelling force” of the “Gospel” that I spoke about a moment ago. This “word of God”, this “word of truth” is the “Gospel”, the “power of God unto salvation”.

Again, over and over, we are being told that every part of our salvation process is exactly as these words tell us,

18 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 (KJV))

I would love to have more time and say more about the rest of this verse, words that tell us that through our new birth, you and I get to become the “firstfruits” of all of God creatures, actual “sons of God”. Jesus, the Son of God, in His resurrection, became the first of the “firstfruits”. And you and I, by our “new birth”, we get to also be “sons of God”, “heirs of God” and “co-heirs with Jesus”, able to call out to God the Father, “Abba Father”. And we get to live forever in the very “House of God”, actually reigning with Him over His kingdom. That is too amazing to imagine.

This, by far, is God’s best “good and perfect gift” to us on this Easter Sunday. It is

18 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 (KJV))