

## God: The Origin of Good and Perfect Gifts

James 1:12-18  
10/10/1999

James, chapter 1. We will read together verses 12 through 18. James, chapter 1, verses 12 through 18.

“Blessed is the man that endures temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to them that love him. Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted by God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. And when lust has conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. Do not err, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.”

Now in our previous studies of verses 12 through 16, we considered together the nature of temptation. And James focused our attention upon its source and its origin, and made it exceptionally clear that temptation and sin does not have its source and origin in God. Rather, temptation finds its source in *man*. And sin is brought to birth *by* man when the combination of his sinful desires, plus the consent of his will, meet together and bring sin into conception and birth.

And so the point that James makes is *very* clear: Men bring sin to birth. Men beget sin. It comes from *men*. Now James is very concerned that we make no error regarding this matter. Notice verse 16: He says, “Do not *err*.” Don’t make a mistake about this. What the source of temptation is and what the origin and author of sin is, *don’t make mistakes about that*.

Errors about the character and the conduct of God are very dangerous. And these errors are to be avoided at all costs, because when we are mistaken about what God *is* and what God *does*, it brings terrible consequences into our lives.

For example, in Romans chapter 1, and in verses 20 through 24, we see that when people “*knew* God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful; but became *vain* in their imaginations. Their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be *wise*, they became fools.” They “*changed* the glory of the incorruptible God into an *image* made like unto corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts and creeping things. Wherefore, God gave them up to *uncleanness* through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves.”

Do you see, an error in theology led to a life of immorality. These people knew the invisible things of God *from* the creation of the world. They were *clearly* seen, being understood by the things which are made, even His eternal power and godhead. So they understood something about God, but then they made an error with reference to that understanding. They determined that they would reject God as He presented Himself—in nature, and in conscience—and they began to pervert who God is and what God was like.

And you see, theological errors always have moral consequences. This is the reason why there is such rampant immorality in our day, because people have such defective views of *God*. People say, “Well, don’t give me that theology stuff, just give me the *practical* stuff.” Well I’ll tell you, if you don’t have your *theology* right, you’re *never* going to get the practical stuff right, because the practical stuff is all *based* on theology. And especially if you don’t have your understanding of *God* correct, then you certainly are never going to get your moral behavior and your treatment of other people correct, either.

And so it is imperative that we do not err—we do not make mistakes—about the nature of God. And so he says, Don’t let any man ascribe this to God. Don’t make a mistake about that. The reason he emphasizes this point so much is that men are very *prone* to blame their sins upon God and accuse Him of being the ultimate source of their sinful behavior, and therefore responsible *for* it. People reason that because God is sovereign over all things, therefore, He is *responsible* for all things, including their sins. And this reasoning is, of course, as old as Adam, who said, “The woman that *you*,” God, gave me, “she gave me to eat, and I did eat.”

And so from the very beginning, the very first sin that entered the human race was blamed on God. God was the source of temptation. It was that *woman*. And so people had been blaming circumstances and people and God ever since as being the cause of the source and the origin of their temptation and of their sin. And of course the *fallacy* of this is that it denies the legitimacy and the free moral agency of second causes. People actually *do* have independent, moral *agency* and the ability to function in such a way that they become the true source and origin of their acts, even though their acts are contained, controlled, and governed in the decrees and the providences of God.

And so when we deny that people can and do make true, free, responsible moral choices, and blame *all* of our acts upon God, we are not only denigrating God by saying He is responsible for sin, but we are also denigrating ourselves by saying we are mere puppets, who just operate as God pulls strings—which is a denial of the true nature and dignity of man.

And so, although God does both decree and govern sinful acts, He does not *perform* them, nor He is the source of them, nor is He the author, nor does He bear responsibility for them. God is *not* the source of sin. He does not give birth to sin, and He is not the source of *temptation*. People alone accomplish that. Don’t make any mistakes about that. That’s what James is saying.

Now by way of an aside, it is interesting to note how quickly people ascribe their temptations and sins to God, but how slowly they are to ascribe their virtues and good works to Him. If I’ve done something wrong, that’s *God’s* fault, but if I’ve done something right, boy, I’ve done pretty well. Well, in fact, that’s turning the whole thing on its head. If I’ve done something wrong, it’s my fault. If I’ve done something right, it’s because a good and perfect gift was given from God. That’s the thrust of our text.

So James now proceeds to tell us what *does* come from God. He has *denied* that temptation comes from God. He has *denied* that God is the author of sin. And having *denied* God as being the author of sin and the conceiver of sin and the source of temptation, James now proceeds to tell us what *does* come from God and what God *does* give birth to. Notice if you will verse 17. “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.”

And so having emphatically denied what does *not* come from God—namely temptation, and what God does *not* give birth to—namely sin, he now tells us what *does* come from God—namely good and perfect gifts, and what God *does* give conception to—namely regenerated sons of God. So in the first place then this evening, let us consider together the source and origin of good and perfect gifts—the source and origin of good and perfect gifts.

Now having proved that God is not the author of sin and the source of temptation, he now sets forth that which God *is* the author of and the source of. He tells us emphatically, God has no direct agency in sin but He *does* have a direct agency in something else, namely, good and perfect gifts. Notice if you will verse 17, “Every good and every perfect gift comes down from the Father.” And so if there is something good and there is something perfect in this world or in us, there is only one source and origin to ascribe it to, and that is God.

Notice if you will, first of all, the nature of these gifts—the nature of these gifts. These gifts are declared to be *good* gifts and *perfect* gifts. That is, they are *good* in that there is no evil of any kind in them. They are unmixed good. They are an unmitigated blessing. The goodness of God is His disposition to pour out blessings upon His *people*. And so *good* things are those things which are blessings to His people. So anything that is a blessing to us is something that is *good*. And if it is good, then it proceeds from God.

And then he also says that they are *perfect* gifts. That is, they are without any defect, they are without any blemish, they are without any kind of imperfection. They are perfect gifts. And the reason why is because *God* is good and God is perfect. And so therefore, God does only good things and He does only *perfect* things. Because His nature, His very nature renders it impossible for Him to do things that are *not* good, or to do things that are less than perfect. And so when God does something, it is done perfectly and it’s an unmixed good. And then notice secondly, not only the nature of those gifts, but the *freeness* of those gifts. The word “gift” here is used twice. It says, “Every good *gift* and every perfect *gift* is from above.” In other words, these things that God does to us that are a blessing *to* us are not payments to us, they are not obligations of His to us, but rather what God gives is an act of grace and of unmerited *favor*. It is a gift. Now the *wages* of sin is death. That’s something we *earn*. But the *gift* of God is eternal life.

So the things that we have that are destructive are things which are *earned* by us and owed *to* us by God’s justice. But the things that we have which are good and *perfect* are the things which are given to us as an act of unmerited grace and favor. And so this is the reason why God says, for example in Isaiah 55 and verse 1, “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.” Now in the day in which this was written, and even in our own day, we would think of wine and milk as unmitigated blessings—gifts from God, things that have been given to us *from* Him *to* us. And so what God is saying is, All this stuff’s *free*—Come and get it! It’s yours for the taking. It comes from Me. I require no price of it. And so this is simply illustrative and representative of *all* of the things we have from God that are free and that are good and that are perfect gifts.

And then notice thirdly, the *origin* of these gifts. It says, specifically, they are “from above.” Now what this means is that these gifts do not have their source in something upon the earth, or

someone upon the earth. It is very, very sad when people talk about the blessings that are brought to us by nature, and the riches that are brought to us by the earth. And the earth is ascribed—this orb below upon which we reside—as the *source* of these wonderful natural resources that we possess and *have*.

Well, in fact, these things have all come from above. They haven't come from something upon this earth; they were given to us by God. And what is true in the realm of *natural* resources is also true in the realm of spiritual resources. Whatever we have that is good from God comes from above. Ephesians 1 and verse 3 says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." And so if we have something good, we don't look around horizontally and say, "Oh, from there's where it came from," or, "Oh, there's where it came from." But rather, we should be vertical in our orientation and say, "This came from God. It came from above. It came from heaven."

And then it says, as to the origin of these gifts, not only that it's from above, but it says it's "from the Father of lights." Now when God here is described as the Father of lights, the lights here are a reference to the sun and the stars. They are that which shed illumination upon the earth. And God here is compared to the sun and the stars because that is the most immutably consistent thing that people in that day and age knew of and comprehended. The sun came up every day. It always shined with the same intensity and the same brightness. It never varied. There was never any turning of it or shadow of it. And it was the same way with the stars. Every night you look up and the North Star is there, and it shines, and it never varies and it never moves and it never changes.

And so God is compared to these planetary, or pardon me, to these astronomical phenomena of the suns and the stars because He is declared to be the One, it says, "with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." That is, it doesn't shine bright one day and then shine less the next day. It doesn't turn and change like the moon does—it has shadows of turning. The stars are not that way, and neither is the sun.

And so what he is doing here in drawing out this analogy between God and these stars and the sun, is they're saying that just as they are changeless, God is changeless. Just as they do not vary, God does vary. His actions do not vary between good and evil. His actions do not vary between perfection and imperfection. His actions do not vary between tempting us at one time and blessing us at another time. God *only* gives good gifts, and He *always* gives good gifts. And that's all He ever can or will do. In Psalm 119 and verse 68, it says of God, "Thou art good and doest good." And so because God is good, He does good, and there is nothing else that God can do.

So the point is simply is this: God is the author of everything that is good in us and everything good that happens *to* us. Therefore, several conclusions follow. First of all, if every good gift and every perfect gift comes down from above from the Father of lights, then we ought not to glory in ourselves if there is anything good *in* us. We must recognize that it comes from *God*. Any good is to be attributed to God and to God alone. And so if we have good character, if we have maturity, if we have wisdom, if we have possessions, we must recognize that all of these good things came from God, and therefore we should *glorify* Him for what He has done in us and for us and to us, and not try and *steal* that glory for *ourselves*.

Nebuchadnezzar fell into that particular sin. You remember he had the dream about the tree that grew up and then it was cut down, and then finally sprouted up. And Daniel interpreted that dream for him and he gave him some counsel. He said, “O, King,” Daniel 4:27, “let my counsel be acceptable to thee, and break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by showing mercy to the poor; if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquility.”

And you see, Nebuchadnezzar didn’t *listen* to that, and in Daniel 4 and verse 30, it says, “The king spoke, and said,” walking out in his balcony and looking over the city of Babylon, he says, “Is not this great Babylon, that *I* have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of *my* power, and for the honor of *my* majesty?” And you see, Nebuchadnezzar had a very good thing—he was, literally, the king of the world at that time. And he had this *fabulous*, fantastic city over which he ruled. And instead of giving *God* the glory for the good gifts that he had, he stole that glory for himself. And what did God do to him? You remember, He humiliated him down to the level of the lowest animal. And he began to eat grass and run around on all fours, and grow his hair and fingernails like feathers and claws, and he was *denigrated* to the level of the lowest animal.

And so if we have something good, by way of position, by way of possessions, by way of blessings, whatever they are—to God be the glory, not to us. If you have any level of intelligence, any level of capacity, recognize that the glory for that belongs to God.

And then secondly, not only ought we not to glory in ourselves but rather in God, secondly, we ought not to look down on others who have something less than we do, by way of intelligence, character, maturity, or possessions. You see, had we all that we possess by our own hand, then we might have a justification for viewing ourselves as being somewhat better than other folks. But the Bible asks the question in First Corinthians, chapter 4, it says, Who made us to differ from another? And what do we have that we have not *received*? And if we have received it, then why do we boast as though we have *not* received it?”

And so if we have a superior socioeconomic status, or superior intellectual capability, or superior blessing in *any* area of our life—a greater maturity, an understanding of the Scriptures, a better memory—whatever our capacities are, we must recognize that these are because God has distributed these gifts to us, and God has *not* distributed those exact same gifts to *others*.

God has some very harsh things to say about those who attribute superiority to themselves and who look down on others. You remember the parable of the publican and the Pharisee in Luke 18, verses 9 through 12. “And he spoke this parable to certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.” And so, what he was doing is he was looking down on those who are not as righteous as he.

Now Christ does not particularly *dispute* that the things that this man said were true. It may be very *well* that this man was *not* like others—that he, in fact, *was* no extortioner, that he wasn’t unjust, or an adulterer, He wasn’t like the publican. He did fast twice in a week, and he did give tithes of all that he possessed. What’s wrong with that? Nothing. Would to God that all God’s people were that righteous in their behavior. But the problem was not what he did, but the

attitude that he had about the blessings he had received in *terms* of this superior level of moral conduct. And that was, is that he despised those who did not possess the level that he had, because he was *ascribing* the level that he had to his own superiority, instead of to God's goodness and blessing.

In Isaiah, chapter 65, and in verse 5, God says, those which say, "Stand by thyself, come not near me; for I am *holier* than thou," God says of them, "These are a smoke in my nose, a fire that burneth all the day." Well after camping for three days and being around a campfire in which we are burning pine, which is about as pitchy and smoky as you can get, and getting that stuff in your eyes and nose from time to time as the wind shifts, I have a new appreciation for that passage and how repugnant superiority is in the eyes of God with reference to others who somehow think that their superiority is attributable to themselves, rather than to God.

And this is why in Proverbs 6, verses 16 through 17, it says, "These six things doth the Lord hate: yea, seven are an abomination to him," and the very first one on the list is "a proud look"—someone who looks down on others who have something less than what they do, in whatever area it might happen to be.

And so it's imperative when we recognize that every good gift and perfect gift comes from the Father, that we ought not then to look down on others who have less than we, because the *reason* why they have less is because God in His sovereign prerogative and wisdom has simply chosen not to *give* them what He's given you. And that's not due to any credit to *you*, but to His own sovereign prerogative.

And that leads me to my third point: We must not *envy* those who have *more* than we do. We must not only not look *down* on those who have *less* than we do, we also must not *envy* those who have *more* than we do. Because what envy is, is it rebellion against God's *liberty* and God's *sovereignty* to distribute His gifts as He sees fit.

You know, when I was raised, my mom had this tremendous concern to treat us all equally, and if she gave one person a dollar, she had to give everybody a dollar. And everybody had exactly the same amount, and everything was fair. And I can see some validity in that. I certainly don't think that we should play favorites with our children, and bless one materially far above another. I think that Joseph's father, Jacob, made some grievous *errors* in that whole area.

But when it comes to God, God distributes His gifts *very* unequally. And you remember the parable He told about sending laborers out into the field, and he sends one guy out at 8 in the morning, and says, "I'll pay you a penny." And then he goes and finds somebody at noon, and he says, "You go out, and I'll pay you whatever it's worth." And he finds somebody at 3, and sends them out, and somebody at 4:30, and sends him out. At 5, he calls them all in. He gives them all a *penny*. And some folks complained about that. And he says, "Can't I do what I want with my own stuff?" And the answer is, Indeed he could.

Because, you see, when it comes to gifts, we must understand that there is no obligation. There's no obligation of equality; indeed, there is no obligation of any kind whatsoever. And so God sovereignly distributes His gifts as He sees fit, and He sees fit to oftentimes give other folks a lot more than He's given to us, both in terms of wisdom, knowledge, character, position, possessions, abilities, intellectual capacities—whatever it may be. And we must not become

envious when good gifts and perfect gifts have been given to other people in greater abundance than they've been given to *us*.

In Proverbs 14, and verse 30, it says, "A sound heart is the life of the flesh: but envy is the rottenness of the bones." Envy will just eat you up alive. Indeed, envy can lead to all other sorts of sins. You remember that Jacob had two wives, Rachel and Leah. And in Genesis, chapter 30, verses 1 through 4, it says, "[W]hen Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister; and said to Jacob, Give me children, or else I die," because by this time, Leah had had several children—I think four, as I recall. "And Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel: and he said, Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb?" In other words, Jacob says to Rachel, Look, it's up to God to distribute His gifts as He sees fit. And if He's given Leah four children, He's given you no children, well, that's His sovereign prerogative to do so, and why are you envious in relationship to that? "And she said, Behold my maid Bilhah, go in unto her; and she shall bear upon my knees, that I may also have children by her. And she gave him Bilhah her handmaid to wife: and Jacob went in unto her." What a sad story. Her envy caused her to lead her husband into immorality.

Well, it is our duty, as we see God distributing His gifts, to, number one, be content with the gifts that God has given to us. And number two, to seek God's *help* to be proper stewards of the gifts that we *do* have. You know, God has given every one of us far more gifts than we deserve. And He has certainly given to us far more gifts than we *use appropriately*. And so instead of bellyaching about somebody's got a bigger bag of marbles than we've got, we need to take the marbles we have and, number one, learn contentment with them. And then, number two, learn to utilize every one of those to the limit of their potential and capacity. And I would dare say that God has given every one of us more marbles than we actually use. So what do we want with more? Greater gifts simply bring greater responsibilities and a more accountable stewardship. And better to have a small stewardship and accountability that's well-managed than a large one that is neglected.

The fourth conclusion that follows is that we must be ever-thankful for God's good gifts. We must be ever-thankful for God's good gifts. If every good gift and every perfect gift comes from above, then when those gifts come, it is our duty to be *thankful* for them. I don't know what good gifts you have today, but you need to sit down and reckon them up, and then you need to get down on your knees and thank God for every one of them, because every one of us has a great deal to be thankful for.

In Psalm 40, and in verse 5, it says, "Many, O LORD my God, are thy wonderful works which thou hast done, and thy thoughts which are toward us: they cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee: if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered." In other words, God has given you and me good and perfect gifts, that if they were to be reckoned up, you couldn't ascribe a *number* to it, there are so many of them. And so we are told and instructed with reference to these gifts in Ephesians 5 and verse 20, that we are to be giving thanks *always* for *all things* unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So instead of being envious of others who have more than we do, or instead of feeling superior to others who have less than we do, or instead of going around patting ourselves on the back for how *well* we've done, what we need to be doing is giving thanks always. And if you're always giving thanks, then you don't have time to glory in yourself, look down on others, or *envy* others,

because your whole focus is not on all that *around* you, it's on God. And so, we have much to be thankful for, while every good gift and every perfect gift comes down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

Well, I'm half-done with my message and altogether done with my time, so we will stop there. Next week, God willing, we will consider together the source and origin of the new birth. We have seen what comes from God. James merely does not negate and say, "Well, this doesn't come from God, and that doesn't come from God, and this other thing doesn't come from God," and just walk off. He says, "*Here* are the things that *do* come from God. Every good and perfect gift comes from God." And secondly, the new birth comes from God, which is the *greatest* of all of those gifts.

He says, "Of his own will begat he us." What does God beget? He begets sons and daughters of God. What do we beget? We conceive sin. And so the products of our conception and the products of *His* conception are two different things. And so we'll look next week, God willing, at the products of *His* conception and see the blessedness that they are and the source from which they come. Well, let us pray together.

Our gracious, heavenly Father, thank you that every good gift and perfect gift comes down from above. And Lord, we confess that your gifts *are* good and that they are *perfect*. Thank you, Father, so much for them. And Lord, I pray that as we experience and enjoy these gifts, we would do what the psalmist declared in Psalm 103, Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits.

Father, indeed, your benefits are more than can be reckoned up by number. And so, Father, help us to always be being thankful. Lord, deliver us from envy and jealousy. Lord, we recognize that whatever gifts we have, however small they are in comparison to others', they are more than we deserve and they are plenty enough for us to manage. And so, Lord, deliver us from envy.

And Lord, as we see that in some respects we have more than others, deliver us from pride. Help us not to ever view ourselves as somehow more worthy of your blessing than others because we've been given more. For Lord, what do we have that has not been given to us as a gift? Help us, then, not to boast as though we have not received it.

And Lord, help us always to give the glory to you, for whatever we possess, however well we've done, either spiritually or materially, Father, to recognize that these are not great things that *we* have done, but rather these are great works that you have done.

Lord, fill us with a spirit of thankfulness. Lord, you truly are consistent. You're immutable. You are unchangeable. You have always done good, you will always do good. You have always done perfectly and you will always do perfectly. Help us then, Father, to be those who give good gifts to others. For Lord, you have been generous with us. Help us then to imitate you, and to take those gifts which you have given to us and spread them around and share them with those, especially the gift of the Gospel, and the gift of our material possessions as well. Father, I pray, that we would imitate you in this matter. In Jesus' name we ask it. Amen.