

# The Epistle of James

Lesson #4

October 10, 2021

## **James 1:17-18**

*17-18 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. Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.*

Let's break it down.

- ***“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above...”***
  - What, if anything, is remarkable or surprising about this statement?
    - The idea that God gives good gifts is not surprising in itself. It really is rather intuitive.
    - In Matthew 7 Jesus remarks that if we who are evil know how to give good gifts to our children, how much more will the Father give good gifts to those who ask him.
    - But it is remarkable that the Creator of all that is should care about us personally, and give us anything.
  - What is the significance of this statement following right on the heels of his teaching about trials and sanctification?
    - He has just emphasized the fact that God does not tempt us to evil. And he wants to make sure no one is deceived or confused on that point.
    - But having made that clear, he immediately makes a statement about God being the giver of all good gifts... including trials.
      - Remember the context: James said for us to consider it to be an occasion for joy when trials come our way, because we know that those trials will produce spiritual maturity in us.
        - Satan certainly is not interested in us having the joy of the Lord.
- ***“coming down from the Father of lights”***
  - What is meant by the Father of lights? Who is being referred to?
    - *This is the only place in the Bible where this term is used.*
    - *John 1:9 The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.*
    - *1 John 1:5 God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.*
- ***“with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change”***
  - What attribute of God is in mind here?
    - This is James' way of speaking of God's unchangeableness, or what theologians refer to as his “immutability”.
    - Not only does God never change, he is actually incapable of changing.
      - What do you think of this statement? Is this what you would have thought?
    - If God were to change his mind or his plan or his decision, it would mean that either God had made a mistake (thus negating his infallibility), or that he had become aware of some piece of information that he had not been aware of previously (thus negating his omniscience).
    - The fact is, God's plans, thoughts, decisions, and actions are always already perfect, and have been from all eternity. He simply doesn't need to change. This is a great comfort!
- ***“Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth”***

- What does it mean to be brought forth? And what is the word of truth?
  - This is a wonderful statement.
  - It is a prime example of a good and perfect gift from God.
    - We were dead in trespasses and sins; God made us alive together with Christ.
    - We were condemned; God made us accepted in the beloved.
    - We were once not a people, now we are the people of God.
    - We were once enemies; God has called us friends. And not just friends, but children of God, and joint heirs with Christ.
    - The list goes on.
  - It is also a clear statement of God's sovereignty in our salvation. Consider what he says:
    - First, it was God's will that something happen.
    - Second he brought us forth; we did not bring our selves forth.
    - Thirdly, he used "the word of truth" (i.e., the gospel) to accomplish what he had willed to happen.
      - *Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes*
  - Compare with John 1:9-13.
- ***"that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures."***
  - In the Old Testament, what was the importance of firstfruits?
    - The first and the best of everything was to be an offering to the Lord.
- **So to summarize verses 2-18:**
  - Trials in and of themselves are not bad, but should actually be considered occasions for joy in the Lord.
  - Trials are instruments God uses for our spiritual growth toward maturity.
  - Trials and temptations both originate from the same Greek word. The difference between the two is the source.
  - Trials come upon us from outside circumstances; but temptations to sin originate in the heart, and they never come from God.
  - God is pleased to provide us with plentiful wisdom in dealing with our trials.
  - Neither our socio-economic station in life nor our natural gifts and abilities are a determining or limiting factor in terms of our standing before God.
  - All good gifts come from our Heavenly Father; and not least among these is the free gift of salvation in Jesus Christ.
  - The promise of eternal life in the presence of God awaits those who endure to the end.
- **Questions for contemplation:**
  - Read James 1:1-18. What one insight seems most applicable to you right now, and why?
  - Describe the joy we can experience in the midst of our trials.
  - How do you normally respond to a trial? Based on this passage, how might you behave differently?

- In the midst of a trial, why should we pray for wisdom, and not simply for perseverance?
  
- What is the surest way to prevent a trial from morphing into a temptation? Give an example.
  
- What is demonstrated when we “remain steadfast under trial”?
  
- How does the truth of God’s immutability comfort you?