



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

Good and Perfect Gifts

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Greg Beaupied / cell: (919) 710-9147 / Greg.Beaupied@capitolcom.org / 206 New Bern Place, Raleigh, NC 27601

Review and Introduction

Previously we discovered the value of trials. Trials, at first thought, are enemies to be avoided, but James says we should count them as opportunities to grow. Growth is a good thing and trials can lead us to joy as we contemplate the way God can use them in our lives.

The same Bible word for trials is used for temptations. Temptations are trials that may cause us to sin when we filter them through our deceitful motivations and lusting hearts.

Here, James returns to the positive side of trials and tells us they are good and perfect gifts when they are used by God to build us into better images of Christ.

James 1:16-18

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.

Don't be deceived...

We already know James is full of imperatives and here is another one expressed in the negative form—don't be deceived. If we can be commanded not to be deceived then we have control over whether or not we succumb to deception. James holds us to a very high standard that we might not naturally attain. Not only are trials to be counted as joy, but now we are told, in so many words, not to allow our evaluation of trials to be ignorant. Most of us love a good excuse to complain about our trials. James pulls this particular rug out from under our feet.

James continues to insist that our issue is sin, and the fault lies within us. We cannot blame God, or the Devil, or the temptation itself. We know that one person's temptation does not have the same effect on another person. Often what is a temptation at one point of our life has no power over us at another time. The difference in the power of a temptation is found in us. We should take every necessary step to avoid falling into sin (Matthew 5:29-30).

... my dear brothers.

It is important to realize James is speaking to those who profess to be followers of Christ. He is leading us to the highest peaks of Christian attitude and living. Trials are rarely welcomed as guests into our lives. James shakes us up and says, in effect, "If you believe in God, then believe Him."

Unbelief is selfish at its core. It wants what it wants and it wants it now! As hard as it first seems, we are told not to want what we naturally desire, but to want what God wants. Sincere and otherwise mature believers can trip at this point. Many understand God to wish us material prosperity, soaring fortunes, perfect health, and complexion without blemishes. All of these things are held out as virtues for twelve minutes of each television show—they are called commercials. They are not messages from God.

Every good and perfect gift is..

James tells us trials are being included in the gifts that are good, and even perfect, as they come from the Father above. When considering the idea of counting trials as joy we should also understand trials are gifts. How do we feel when we receive a gift? Joyful! How would you react if you were to receive a perfect gift?

God gave us his Son which is all any of us need. But He also promises to make all things work together for our good if we love Him and our purposes are His purposes (Romans 8:28). He gives us the Holy Spirit (Luke 11:13) to stand beside us and comfort us.

A familiar, and sometimes puzzling, passage begins to make sense when we understand it from James' perspective.

"Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him (Matthew 7:9-11)!"

...from above,

We are once again reminded of the source of good gifts. They are from above. One way to check on the value of a gift is to consider its source.

BIBLE STUDIES

LEGISLATORS: MONDAYS, 5:00 PM, ROOM 1425

STAFF: MONDAYS, 12:00 NOON, CHAPEL

North Carolina

James

... coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights,

God is the creator of light. “Let there be light” (Genesis 1:3). Jesus is the light of the world (John 1). God presented Himself to Israel as light, the *shekinah* (Exodus 13:21, Luke 2:9). Jesus was enthroned in light at His transfiguration (Matthew 17:2). Heaven is described as a place that has no sun or moon to shine as the glory of the Lord will be its light (Revelation 21:23).

James has embedded two ideas in the notion of God as the Father of the heavenly lights. That is, God gives us material blessings and spiritual blessings. As the Father of lights he created the material world, but the Father of lights is obviously a God to be worshipped as the transcendent One. He is the ultimate source of all blessings.

... who does not change like shifting shadows.

James has made a shift from our trials to a consideration of the wonder of God. That is where the mature Christian ought to end up—with the glory of God. Here he is described as One who does not change. James teaches us these things to underscore we are called to maturity, and it is only found as we move and have our being in Him.

The created lights move according to their physical properties. Therefore, in the cosmos we have shadows that move and change. But God is not a god who lives in shadows, He is light. The absence of the sun is not darkness to Him.

The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp (Revelation 21:23).

He chose to give us birth...

This not referring to natural birth, but James is speaking of supernatural birth. James does not major on the gospel to the extent of Paul, but he does not ignore it either. Here, James says God chose to give us birth. Salvation is of the Lord (Psalm 27:1, Jonah 2:9).

... through the word of truth,

This phrase is found five times in the New Testament. James uses it here and Paul the other four times. The phrase means the gospel.

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation (Ephesians 1:13).

Peter says much the same thing.

For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God (1 Peter 1:23).

... that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.

The first fruits were the first products of the flock and field in the Old Testament. It was from the first fruits that an offering was made to God in the Temple service.

James has three Old Testament principles in mind:

1. The first fruits belong to God.
2. The first fruits were only the best.
3. The first fruits were a confession that God is the supplier of all we need.

James says we are a kind of first fruits. God harvests us, and He will take special care of us because we are special to Him. If we fail we can turn to him and ask for mercy, and when we persevere to the end we will receive a crown of life (verse 12).

For your consideration...

1. How does the high standard set by James help us understand that we are not as good as we might think we are? What does this have to do with excuse making?
2. Can you think of an everyday example of a good gift that may not be considered a gift by the receiver?
3. What part does prayer have as we try to see our lives from God's perspective?