

James 1:16-18 - Good and Perfect Gifts from the Father of Lights

Last week we looked at the Crown of Life — The Reward for Overcoming Temptation — James 1:12-16. This week we will cover James 1:16-18 and will learn about the perfect and good gifts we receive from our Heavenly Father.

Our memory verses for the book of James:

James 1:2-4

² My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, ³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. ⁴ But let patience have *its* perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

Today's scripture:

James 1:16-18

¹⁶ Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. ¹⁷ Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. ¹⁸ Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.

v 16 - 17 **Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. ¹⁷ Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above:** What can we learn from this? Satan wants to deceive us into believing that the good things God gives us are not actually good. He wants us to doubt God's goodness, perfection, and His unconditional agape love for us. The ultimate example of this happened in the Garden of Eden. We can learn a lot from this.

Genesis 3:1-8

Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he [satan, Rev 12:9] said to the woman, **“Has God indeed said [creates doubt], ‘You shall not eat of every [causes confusion] tree of the garden?’”**

² And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; ³ but of the fruit of the tree which *is* in the midst of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat it, **nor shall you touch it [legalism]**, lest you die.’”

⁴ Then the serpent said to the woman, **“You will not surely die [an outright lie and contradiction]. ⁵ For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil”** [satan's direct challenge of God's goodness].

⁶ So when the woman saw that **the tree was good for food [lust of the flesh or craving for physical pleasure], that it was pleasant to the eyes [lust of the eyes or craving for everything we see], and a tree desirable to make one wise [pride of life or pride in our achievement and possessions],** she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate. ⁷ Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they *were* naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings.

⁸ And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife **hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God [sin brings shame and separation from God]** among the trees of the garden.

Notice how satan first caused Eve to doubt with, “**Has God said,**” and he also misquoted God to cause confusion when he said, “You shall not eat of **every** tree of the garden”. Eve responds with an extra rule which sounds like common sense, “nor shall you touch it”, but it is actually not what God said. Adding rules to regulate behaviour is legalism. Legalism is always a substitute for a true love relationship with God. A person who loves God will obey Him because they want to, not because they have to, not because they are bound by a system of rules and regulations. Rules and regulations equals religion, which is the opposite or antithesis of relationship.

Then satan moved in for the kill, “**“You will not surely die. ⁵ For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”** Satan directly challenges God’s integrity and His goodness. Satan denies the consequence of sin, and in place of the good and perfect gifts that God had already given Adam and Eve, satan offers them the world — things that are **good for food (physical cravings), pleasant to the eyes (cravings for what we see),** and a tree **desirable to make one wise (pride of life)**. This matches up perfectly with:

1 John 2:15-16 NKJV

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For all that *is* in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is **not of the Father but is of the world.**

1 John 2:15-16 NLT

Do not love this world nor the things it offers you, for when you love the world, you do not have the love of the Father in you. ¹⁶ For the world offers only a craving for physical pleasure, a craving for everything we see, and pride in our achievements and possessions. **These are not from the Father, but are from this world.**

Notice what 1 John 2:16 finishes with, “**These [gifts] are not from the Father, but are from this world.**” There has always been this tension between God and Satan. God desires to give us good gifts, while satan offers us gifts that appear good, but only cause death (of course satan never tells us that at the start). This is the choice that every person has. It’s like God offers us meat and vegetables for dinner, while satan offers coke and fairy floss. Although the coke and fairy floss may appeal to us initially, eventually they will kill us, whereas the meat and vegetable diet will make us strong and healthy.

Now let’s look at the consequences of Adam and Eve’s choice. In Genesis 3:8 it says that “Adam and his wife **hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God** among the trees of the garden.” Notice two things here.

1. The good and perfect gifts that God gives us keep us in fellowship with Himself — we experience complete satisfaction and joy in our love relationship with God.
2. Satan’s gifts are designed to draw us away from or out of fellowship with God and will eventually lead to death. Even as Christians we can experience death when we choose to be dominated by our sin nature (Romans 8:5-6) — death in the sense that we suffer loss — loss of relationships, loss of reputation, loss of reward, loss of freedom to serve God, loss of our health, loss of our virginity and purity, etc.

This is why it’s so important for us to trust God what God says, to believe that what He wants to give us is really the best thing for us, because we will only find true joy and contentment in our relationship with God.

God first and foremost has given us Himself. There is no greater gift that we can receive than to be in relationship with Him.

Always be in wonder that we can be in relationship with the Creator of the universe, the Author of Life, the only source of unconditional, agape love. Don't be like Adam and Eve and throw it away for what the evil world has to offer. Like them, you will find that your God replacement will only cause you pain and suffering and leave you empty and dry. Listen to God's warning in:

Jeremiah 2:11-13

¹¹ Has any nation ever traded its gods for new ones,
even though they are not gods at all?

Yet my people have exchanged their glorious God
for worthless idols!

¹² The heavens are shocked at such a thing
and shrink back in horror and dismay,"
says the Lord.

¹³ "For my people have done two evil things:

They have abandoned me—
the fountain of living water.

And they have dug for themselves cracked cisterns
that can hold no water at all!

Back to **James 1:17**

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.

v 17 **With whom there is no variation or shadow of turning:** God's goodness is constant, it never changes — there is **no variation** with Him. What this means is that God is completely dependable and will never let us down. God is always good. He will never break His promises and He will never leave or forsake us. Consider:

Hebrews 13:4-6

Marriage *is* honourable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.

⁵ **Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have.** For He Himself has said, "*I will never leave you nor forsake you.*" ⁶ So we may boldly say:

*"The Lord is my helper;
I will not fear.
What can man do to me?"*

I have always loved these verses in Hebrews because of the great promises here, "I will never leave you nor forsake you," and "the Lord is my helper." However, as I was studying for today's message, I understood the context for the first time: **Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have.**

Notice:

1. Verse 5 speaks about people not being content with marriage, warning those who seek sexual pleasure outside of marriage that there will be judgement for them. This has always been a problem and will always be a problem. It is becoming a huge problem in today's sexualised world.
2. The secret to not coveting the things of the world (especially sexual gratification) is to be content, but content with what? Actually the question is not with "what", but "who". The "**such things as you have**" is actually God Himself, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." Wow!

So you see how it has been from the beginning. God gives us Himself, and there is nothing that can be compared to the joy of abiding in the love of God.

John 15:9-11

"I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love. ¹⁰ When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father's commandments and remain in his love. ¹¹ I have told you these things so that **you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow!**

Walking in obedience to God, motivated by love for God, brings the highest form of pleasure that any human can experience.

Psalm 16:11

You will show me the path of life;
In Your presence *is* fullness of joy;
At Your right hand *are* pleasures forevermore.

If we are willing to be content with our relationship with God, to by faith believe that "**Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights**", we will seek no other. Adam and Eve stopped pursuing their love relationship with God, they forsook their relationship with God, and they ended up miserable. Remember, satan offers short term gain or pleasure for long term pain and discomfort.

Remember that the Ultimate Gift, the Messiah and Saviour of all mankind, literally came down from heaven, from the Father of lights. There can be no greater gift than the life of the precious Son of God given to redeem me and cause me to be adopted into God's glorious and eternal family.

v 17 **the Father of lights**: Instead of shadows, God is **the Father of lights**.

Guzik: "According to Hiebert, the ancient Greek is actually "the Father of *the* lights." The specific **lights** are the celestial bodies that light up the sky, both day and night. The sun and stars never stop giving light, even when we can't see them. Even so, there is never a **shadow** with God. When night comes, the darkness isn't the fault of the sun; it shines as brightly as before. Instead, the earth has turned from the sun and darkness comes."

What does this tell us? God always desires to bless us, but we must be willing to receive those gifts or blessings. The light is always shining, but we can turn our backs. God never turns away from us. It's always us who turn away from God.

James 1:18

Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.

v 18 **He brought us forth**: Trapp: “The word properly signifies, He did the office of a mother to us, the bringing us into the light of life.” This is us being born again, born of the Spirit, transferred into the kingdom of God, and adopted into God’s family.

v 18 **Of His own will He brought us forth**: Spurgeon explains what “**of His own will**” means: “Now mostly, men who are generous need to have their generosity excited. They will need to be waited upon; appeals must be laid before them; they must sometimes be pressed; an example must lead them on. **But ‘of his own will’ God did to us all that has been done, without any incentive or prompting, moved only by himself, because he delighteth in mercy; because his name and his nature are love** because evermore, like the sun, it is natural to him to distribute the beams of his eternal grace.”

Salvation is a **gift** given by God, and not something that we can work for or earn (Ephesians 2:8-9). It is **of His own will**. God saves us simply because He wants to, because He loves us — there is no other reason.

Romans 5:8

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

v 18 **by the word of truth**: Faith comes by hearing the word of God, the word of truth (Romans 10:17). The word of truth brings both the knowledge and conviction of sin (Romans 3:19-20). Salvation comes by hearing the word of truth, the word of God:

Luke 8:11-12

“Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. ¹² Those by the wayside are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.

v 18 **That we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures**: Guzik: “We can see God’s goodness in our salvation, as He initiated our salvation **of His own will** and **brought us forth** to spiritual life by His **word of truth**, that we might be to His glory as **firstfruits** of His harvest.”

Previously James told us what the lust of man brings forth: sin and death. Here he tells us what the **will** of the good God brings: salvation to us, described as **a kind of firstfruits of His creatures**.

Application — Discerning between God’s Good Gifts and Satan’s Deceptive Gifts — Marriage and Sexual Purity

v 16 - 17 **Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.** ¹⁷ **Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above:** This is really important for today's world to hear and understand. Therefore, I am going to spend some time explaining what it means and applying it to our world, and especially the church, today. In summary, we receive gifts from two sources: the good and perfect gifts from the Father of lights; and the deceptive and harmful gifts that are on offer from Satan in the world. What can be very difficult, though, is to discern what a good and perfect gift is, and what a deceptive and harmful gift is.

While Satan, either directly or through the world, offers us many pleasant and enjoyable things that appeal to our sinful nature, they all fall short of the good and perfect gifts that God gives, even if they don't seem like it at first. For example: money and material possessions. Many would say that someone winning the lottery or inheriting a lot of money, and never having to work another day in their lives, would count as a good and perfect gift. But is it really? The fact is that many families who have come into easy money end up fighting over the money, and as a result often split up. The fact is that many people's family relationships were definitely a lot better off without the extra cash.

Another example is the instant gratification of our God-given desire for emotional and physical intimacy. If I only had a girlfriend I would be happy..., and/or, if I could just kiss her and be intimate with her I would be satisfied. This is currently one of Satan's most successful, but also most destructive lies. This bait of instant gratification of our God-given desire for physical intimacy, and our desire to be loved and accepted, is being swallowed by people in the world and in the church — but do you know what happens to a fish when it is caught? It gets eaten.

1 Peter 5:8-11

Be sober [self-controlled, restrained], be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. ⁹ Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. ¹⁰ But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle *you*. ¹¹ To Him *be* the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

The Greek word translated **sober** (*nepho*) in 1 Peter 5:8 means to be self-controlled or restrained, to abstain from something, e.g. wine, sexual temptation, drugs, or anything else that we are tempted with. Remember how last week we were learning about enduring temptation. We need to develop that patience or perseverance or endurance — that ability to remain strong under pressure and not seek to escape the pressure. This quality is very similar to self-control. For this part of the message I will be focusing on the temptation of instant gratification, and how it applies to God's good and perfect gifts.

When Satan offered Jesus all the kingdoms of the world if Jesus would only worship him, Satan was basically saying, enjoy the gain without enduring the pain. The temptation is, “why wait when you can have it now, and, you won't have to suffer to get it — just worship me, obey me, submit to me, and you can have anything you want, when you want it?” What he didn't say is that Jesus would then be his slave.

Overall, the desires of our sinful nature are for instant gratification of our desires and for comfort. We tend to only want to do the things that make us feel good right now. The application for today: many people, both believers and unbelievers, reject marriage because it requires a large amount of self-control and self-discipline to remain pure until marriage. Also, maintaining our commitment to love our spouse is not a comfortable thing — it involves much sacrifice and discomfort as we die to our sinful nature.

Let's consider a believer who wants to get married. When they meet a potential spouse what challenges will they face? I believe that the most difficult temptation for them to overcome in today's sexualised world is to treat their future spouse as a sister (or brother). The bible instructs us to hold our desires for physical gratification at bay, to temporarily deny ourselves what feels good.

1 Timothy 5:2

Treat older women as you would your mother, and treat younger women with all purity as you would your own sisters.

1 Corinthians 7:1-2

It is good for a man not to touch a woman. ² Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband.

Hebrews 13:4

Marriage *is* honourable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.

Do you go around kissing young women on the lips? I hope not! God says, "wait, remain physically pure, treat your future spouse as a sister, and I will bless you." In contrast Satan says, "Why wait to kiss your future spouse until your wedding day, and why even get married, when you can have all of her now: after all, you're going to be together eventually anyway, right? So why wait? Why put yourself through all that pain called delayed gratification, and burden yourself with all that unnecessary commitment?"

Friends, take a good hard look around you and see the effects of this deception: dysfunctional families, millions of abortions (murdered babies), single parent families, poor work ethic, gangs, along with increased: crime, depression, suicide, drug use, drunkenness, and much higher rates of sexual, physical, and emotional abuse. And the world calls this love? Really. Actually the bible calls it lust. Love is selfless, while lust is selfish.

I haven't yet met one single mum or dad yet who doesn't regret not doing things God's way, by waiting for His good and perfect husband or wife for them. They thought that sleeping with that boy would be fun, exciting, and romantic: but the end of it was pain, often a lifetime of pain. They took satan's bait, they believed satan's lie, and now they have been chewed up and spit out by satan. Of course, with true repentance, God is often merciful and creates a family. But as we have talked about previously, the effects or consequences of forgiven sin last for life.

Another consequence of this loose living is found in those where an illegitimate child didn't result. Physical intimacy results in you giving away a part of yourself to the other person.

1 Corinthians 6:15-18

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make *them* members of a harlot? Certainly not! ¹⁶ Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body *with her*? For “*the two,*” He says, “*shall become one flesh.*” ¹⁷ But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit *with Him*.

¹⁸ Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body.

Becoming one body is a good thing in marriage, where the other person is trustworthy and will look after your heart. It's beautiful and creates a very special bond. But in a temporary relationship (or a divorce) this is a disaster. For many, this physical and emotional bond that results from physical intimacy is very strong and has kept many in destructive relationships for far, far too long. For others, it is the cause of ongoing emotional distress — “I have this connection with that person, but I can't be with them anymore.” (example of kissing a girl when younger - still remember)

Then there are those who choose to indulge in pornography as a way of satisfying the cravings of their sinful nature. Again, recognise this for what it is - chasing and swallowing satan's bait of instant gratification of your God given desire for physical intimacy.

Of course, those, specifically christians, who are engaged in this loose behaviour, these sexual addictions, are out of fellowship with God. This is the ultimate price to pay for temporary pleasure. A verse from the hymn “Trust and Obey” says it well:

“But we never can prove [experience] the delights of His love
Until all on the altar we lay;
For the favour He shows, and the joy He bestows,
Are for those who will trust and obey.”

All who are in bondage to habitual sin, whether it be fornication (sex outside of marriage, adultery (sex with someone else while married), or pornography, whatever form it may take, have been robbed by satan of experiencing the “delights of His love, the favour He shows and the joy He bestows.” Also see John 14-16.

Truely, a pure and Christ centred marriage is one of the most beautiful and precious gifts that God gives to mankind. God gave us a marriage as a picture of our relationship with Him. We are separate from Him until He comes to get us. Our marriage with Christ starts off as a long distance betrothal or engagement, with full intimacy only happening when Jesus comes back to get us and take us to be where He is, to the place prepared for us — heaven.

John 14:1-3

“Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. ² In My Father's house are many mansions; if *it were* not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, *there* you may be also.

This is where, in a spiritual sense, our marriage to Christ is consummated. Jesus has been preparing for almost 2,000 years for the moment when the Father tells Him that it's time for Him to come and get His bride. He is longing for and thinking about that

special day we call the rapture, when Jesus comes to collect His church. As Christians, we should live in both growing expectation and anticipation of being in the physical presence of Christ and knowing Him as He knows us.

1 Corinthians 13:12

For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.

Example of not wanting to leave Merissa in the weeks leading up to the wedding — nothing else mattered, we just wanted to get married so we could be together. I remember that Merissa wrote a poem called, “no more goodbyes.” As Christians, we need to realise that this is what life is all about — knowing and loving Christ more intimately. It should be what we live and strive for. Merissa and I had decided to remain physically pure, and the result was that our love for each other was also pure and truly beautiful. After we compromised when we kissed each other earlier on in our relationship, we chose for the last 5 months of our engagement to put 1 Corinthians 4:12 into practice:

1 Timothy 4:12

Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, **in purity [chastity: physically or sexually pure]**.

Truly, the quickest way to ruin our reputation, both in the church and in the world, is to not be pure or chaste. Purity in this verse means chastity, which means to be physically pure. We represent Christ, so understand that what we do reflects directly on Him.

Please notice an important principle here: the longer the desire for a good thing is delayed, the greater its value becomes, the more satisfying it is, and the more we appreciate it when we finally get what was promised — the anticipation and excitement only builds and builds as time goes on. For example, Abraham and Sarah waited 25 years for the promised son. What was it like for them? Difficult, but they experienced immense joy when Isaac (laughter) was finally born. Their joy was proportional to the wait or effort or suffering that they had endured. Let's consider an example — delaying the promised bottle of cold water to someone stranded in the desert with nothing to drink — after a couple of days the water is all they can think about and the longer the time goes on the more thirsty they become, and so the more they will appreciate the bottle of water.

The conclusion is that only God actually knows what we need, what is really good for our eternal welfare, what will cause us to grow in our relationship with Him, and therefore bring God more glory and us more joy and satisfaction as we abide more deeply in His love. The fact is that my sinful nature wants lots of things that aren't good for me, and it's hard for me to distinguish between the desires and appetites of my sinful nature, and those of my spirit. This is why I need to be in the word of truth.

The uncomfortable fact is that sometimes the **good and perfect** gifts that God gives us sometimes do seem to be very **good** or **perfect** when we receive them. Often, it's only later that we appreciate the value of them. But most importantly, never forget the Greatest Gift who came down from heaven to earth to die in my and your place.