

God's Greatest Gift

Be turning into your Bible to James chapter 1. We'll be looking at verses 17-21 as we consider the topic God's Greatest Gift. **(James 1:17) 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.** This is one of the greatest verses in all of scripture. It's been said that this verse is not only wonderfully simple, it is simply wonderful. First let us notice that the God we worship is described as the Father of lights. The word "lights" refers to the heavenly bodies. James is simply saying that it was God who created the sun, moon and the stars and put them all in their places.

God made the creation, but He is different from the creation. We understand that the creation is subject to change. In fact, it is in a constant state of change. That is obvious by something as simple as the shadow that's cast by the sun. We know that the length of a shadow varies with the time of day and the position of the sun in the sky. This variation of shadow length is evidence that this ole universe is in constant change.

But in contrast to that, James tells us that our Heavenly Father has no variation. There is no shadow that's cast by Him. He remains the same, and what an encouraging thought that is. That gives me something to hold on to. In times of trouble and turmoil, that is an anchor for my soul. We learn in **(Heb 13:8) Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.** He doesn't change and that's the kind of God we need, a God who is consistent and remains the same without change.

There is one other spiritual truth in these verses that I want us to notice and it's really where we want to put our focus. And that's simply the fact that **every good gift and every perfect gift is from above.** If it is good, then it comes to us through the Father. Some people don't seem to understand that. They blame God for all sorts of things. If it's bad, they think He is responsible and they become bitter and resentful toward God. But we learn from this passage that God is the source of only good things.

But of all the great gifts that God sends our way, what would you say is the greatest gift of all? Well, we don't have to wonder about that because James tells us in verse 18. **{18} Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.** First notice the text says, "He begat us." Some translations say, "He brought us forth." Really this was a medical term that was used for giving birth. So you could very well translate that, "of his own will, he gave us birth" or better yet, "he gave us new life." He's talking about the gift of salvation. Really, the Bible refers to salvation as a new birth in other places. Remember in John chapter 3 and the Lord's conversation with Nicodemus. In verse 5 Jesus said, **(John 3:5), Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.** The Lord was talking about a spiritual birth that imparts spiritual life. So James says of all the great and wonderful things that God gives us, the greatest gift of all is this new life. Several things are then pointed out about this new life.

FIRST OF ALL, HE TELLS US HOW IT IS DELIVERED. Notice verse 18 again. **{18} Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.** We learn that this new life is DELIVERED BY THE FATHER'S WILL. Of his own will he begat us. If you are saved, it will not be because you deserve it. It will not be because you have lived such a wonderful life that you have obligated God to take you to heaven. It's not as if we are such fine

people and we sorta back God into a corner and he had no other option. God didn't have to do what he has done in our behalf. God could have let us die and be lost without lifting a finger and he would have been just and right in doing so. But in spite of the fact that we are unworthy, God took the initiative and provided for us a way to be saved. You see, it was of GOD'S OWN WILL.

Now God didn't make this new life arbitrarily and indiscriminately. James did not say that God is going to save everybody regardless. God's wants us to be saved, but you too have to want it. There are some conditions attached for one to receive this gift of new life. What you need to understand is that if you are lost, it is **NOT** because God wants you to be lost. If you are lost, it will be your own fault and no one else.

NOW NOTICE, THE NEW LIFE IS DELIVERED BY THE FATHER'S WORD. {18} *Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth.* He's referring to the gospel, the power of God unto salvation. There are other passages that refer to it in the same way. For instance (*Col 1:5*) ***For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel;*** Isn't that a beautiful way to describe God's word-the word of truth. You know it's the word of truth because it comes from God, and God can not lie. So what we have recorded in scripture, you can rest assured that it is absolutely true and dependable. So in the word of God, we find all spiritual truth. We find the truth about God, about man, about salvation, and life after death. Only from the Bible does man have any insight about life after death. So, ***Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth.***

The word of truth is involved in our salvation. Peter explains how that happened over in (*1 Pet 1:23*) ***Being born again,*** (there's that idea of a new birth again) ***not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.*** So you have being born again by incorruptible seed and that's important. We were all born into this world physically by perishable seed. This is evident with people dying because perishable seed only produces perishable life. But it is possible to be born of imperishable seed and that seed is the word of God. This seed imparts an imperishable life – a life that will never end.

How does that happen? Well we are told back up in verse 22 (*1 Pet 1:22*) ***Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth*** It's through the obedience to the truth, the gospel that this new life is imparted. So James tells us that this new life is imparted by the Father's will through the word of truth.

THIRDLY, THIS NEW LIFE IS DELIVERED FOR THE FATHER'S WORSHIP. Look at it again {18} ***Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.*** That term "*firstfruit*" takes us back to the Old Testament. When the harvest time drew near, the people would go out into their fields and they would find the first part of the grain that ripened. That was the first fruit. They would take that first fruit and give it to the priest and he would wave it there before the Lord. Thus it is sometimes thought of as a "wave offering." The "first- fruit" offering served several purposes.

First, it was an act of consecration. In essence they were saying, "*Father, all that I have is from you, it all belongs to you, so I am giving back to you the first and very best.*" And when we obey the word of truth and become Christians that is what we are doing. We are saying, "*God, my life belongs to you and I want to give to you the first and very best that I have to give.*"

Secondly, the first fruit was assurance of the rest of the harvest was to follow. It was an acknowledgement saying that there was more to come. So today, when a person receives that new

life, it is God's assurance that what he has done for others, he can do for us. You know every time a person walks down the isle and is baptized into Christ and his sins are washed away, God is in essence saying, if I can do that for him, then I can do that for you. If I can wash one sinner from the depths of sin, then I can do that for any sinner and every sinner. Isn't it wonderful to know that God does not exclude anybody from the opportunity of salvation? Scripture says, "**whosoever will may come.**" Every time a person becomes a child of God, it is a guarantee to others that the same doorway is open to them. So the new life is delivered: (1) by the Fathers will, (2) by the word of truth and (3) for his worship.

Notice also how this new life is demonstrated. When a person begins a new life, it ought to be obvious to those around them by the way he lives on a daily basis. Verse 19 gives us three ways that those around us can tell that we have this new life. **{19} Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.** First he says you will be swift to hear. That's talking about responsiveness to the word of God. We ought to be willing to hear it and to heed it. For just a moment, jump back with me to the book of 1 Thessalonians. **(1 Th 2:13-15) For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.** Here the apostle Paul is saying you received, or accepted the word. That word "receive" literally means "to welcome, to embrace." It's like being reunited with a loved one that you haven't seen for years and how you embrace them. Likewise, we ought to embrace the word of God with open arms and be eager to hear what God wants us to hear and let that word work within us.

That's why so often we are concerned about a person's attendance because your attendance is a spiritual barometer of your spiritual condition. When you are here for Bible class and every other service, that indicates that there is eagerness in your heart to be swift to hear and learn the word of God.

Secondly, we also ought to be slow to speak. Understand, James is not saying speak slowly as people in the south are pronged to do. Instead, he's talking about being slow to talk. He is warning us about being hasty in our speech and saying too much. As one man said, "*Never miss the opportunity to shut up*"

The book of Proverbs has a good bit to say about being hasty in our speech and being too quick to talk. For instance: **(Prov 10:19) In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise.**

(Prov 13:3) He that keepeth his mouth keepeth his life: but he that openeth wide his lips shall have destruction.

(Prov 29:20) Seest thou a man that is hasty in his words? there is more hope of a fool than of him. We ought to be careful with our speech and season our words with salt. Understand, we don't have to tell every thing that we know. I've heard it said that God gave us two ears and one mouth and we ought to use them accordingly.

Thirdly, we are to be slow to wrath – slow to anger. There is a connection between slow to speak and slow to wrath. Sometimes words lead to wrath or anger. Remember **(Prov 15:1) A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.** Well, we all know that's true don't we? Generally, when you are close to someone, you know just exactly what to say to really get under

their skin don't you? Sometimes, thoughtless words lead to wrath, so we are warned against such here in James. I understand that the Bible at times mentions a righteous anger, but I think we all recognize that's not the kind of anger being considered here. Here he is talking about the wrong kind of anger for he goes on to say: **{20} For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.** That simply means, sinful anger does not bring about the kind of life that pleases the Heavenly Father. A temper out of control leads us to do and say things not appropriate and when that happens, we do tremendous harm to the cause of Christ. I wonder how many people that are not Christian's have watched a Christian conduct himself in a none-Christian way when angry, and because of that behavior have decided they didn't want to be any part of Christianity. So that new life is demonstrated in a very practical way, swift to hear, slow to speak and slow to wrath.

In closing, notice quickly how the new life is developed. When a person is born into the family of God, they do not enter into that family full-grown. Like with a physical birth, a new Christian is a "*Babe in Christ*" so there is a process of growth and maturing. James tells us that the word of God has a very significant part to play in that process. We are to receive the engrafted word, or planted seed. **{21} Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.**

Engrafted word is like a seed that's planted in a garden. In order to have a good garden; there are two things you need to do. One you need to remove the weeds. You find a beautiful garden spot and then you proceed to remove the grass and weeds before you plant. So it is with God's word. First you have to remove the weeds from you heart. You **lay apart all filthiness** (moral defilement). When there is sin in you heart, it keeps the word of God from being productive in your life. Then there is the **superfluity of naughtiness** (overflowing of wickedness). That word superfluity means "excess or residue." Something left over. When one becomes a new Christian, they often bring in some baggage with them. There are some leftover's from the old life. Well, before the word of God can penetrate our heart and flourish, we need to work on those old habits and attitudes – the superfluity of naughtiness.

After you have done a little bit of weeding, you need to **receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.** To receive the word requires one to have a teachable spirit with meekness. If you allow the word of God to take root in your heart and you weed out all those undesirables, it will make a tremendous difference in your life and your life will become a beautiful garden for the Lord. Once that word has been engrafted, it is to be put into practice. Notice **{25} But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.** We are not to be hears only, but doers of the work. Now brethren, we are talking about more than simply attending worship services for a few hours a week. We are talking about being a "*doer of the work.*" All of us understand that work entails effort and energy. That means be a life of faithfulness and service. Such a person will be blessed.

What about your life? Have you received that great gift from God, by that I mean have you received that new life by obeying the gospel and becoming a child of God. If not, we encourage you to do that. If you are a Christian, but the weeds of life have overtaken your spiritual garden, we encourage you to do a little weed eating and rededicate you live to being a doer of the work and not simply a hearer only.

Invitation.