

Gifts And Demands Of The Father Of Lights.

Text: James 1:16-21

1) His gifts

Suggested Hymns:

2) His demands

012 ALHB, 262, 127, 604, 515

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is James 1:16–21, *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.*

¹⁹ So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; ²⁰ for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God. ²¹ Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

“Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren” says James in our Epistle. He deals with a subject concerning which even brethren, Christians, may be deceived, if they are not better informed.

And what is that? In the preceding verses he says: *“^{d3} Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. ¹⁴ But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. ¹⁵ Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.”*

The Apostle is telling us, my dear Christians, it is an error to think that temptations come from God, that God tempts you that you should sin; for then God Himself would be the author of sin and the cause of sin. To say such a thing

is blasphemy. No; the author of sin is the devil, and you are subject to temptations and drawn into temptations because the lust of sin is within you.

If you were still in the state in which God created man in the Garden of Eden, in the state of innocence, without sin, in perfect holiness, you would possess the power to resist any temptation.

But it is the sin which is within you, the sinful inclination which you have inherited from Adam, your natural depravity, which draws you away from God and entices you into actual sin.

Now, this deception and error of which the Apostle speaks is very common among Christians. Even if we know and believe that in no way God is the author of sin, are not our natural hearts so depraved that often, before we are aware of it, we find ourselves murmuring and blaming God for the evil which has come upon us?

Is it not an undeniable fact, that we are all naturally inclined to give ourselves credit for the good which we receive, but to shift the blame on others when evil has come upon us? Can we deny that we even blame the great God in heaven when, in the days of adversity, when some great misfortune has befallen us, we say: *Why have I deserved this?*

Most emphatically the Apostle declares in our Epistle that no evil comes from God, but only that which is good. God is the Father of lights, the merciful Giver of good and perfect gifts. But He does not only give, He also demands.

Let us therefore consider *Gifts And Demands Of The Father Of Lights*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. His Gifts

The Apostle says, 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.*

Here we are informed that only good and perfect gifts can come from God, because He is the Father of lights. The Father of lights — what a splendid title! He is called the Father of lights because He made the lights which are posted in the firmament of heaven, the sun, the moon, and the starry host.

But what is the lustre and splendour of these heavenly bodies compared to the light in which God dwells forever? *Who alone has immortality*, as St. Paul says in his First Epistle to Timothy,¹ *dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see*. The sun is a bright, dazzling light, but there are spots even in the sun, and the moon governs the night with her soft light, but the moon waxes and wanes.

With God, however, there is one continuous light without change and interruption; “*with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning*” as the Apostle says. And light is the symbol of holiness and purity, while darkness is the emblem of sin and evil. God is unchangeable in His perfect holiness. How, then, can any evil thing proceed from God?

Indeed, darkness cannot proceed from the sun just as evil cannot proceed from the holy God. As in the creation God saw the things which He had made and saw that in every case it was good, so to the end of the world all things are good which come from God because God is the Father of lights who never changes.

The Apostle distinguishes between two kinds of gifts that come from God. First he mentions good gifts. He obviously means the gifts that pertain to this life, and admonishes us to bear in mind that we are indebted to God for every good thing we enjoy in this life. How countless, how immeasurable are these good gifts which daily and continually we receive from the hand of our kind and caring Creator!

The air which we breathe, the water which we drink, the sunshine which we enjoy, the rain which moistens our fields, food, clothing, health, friends, happy hours, protection in danger — these are all good gifts that come from above, from the Father of lights.

Even your life, my friends, is a good gift which you have received from God, and if your life should be ever so miserable a life, it is a good gift, because, if you make the right use of it, it will lead you into a blessed hereafter, and you are not privileged to put an end to your own life and to commit suicide that you might escape your misery, for it is God's gift.

If, as a worthless gift, you throw it away, you will find that God will not be mocked and that, instead of ending your misery, it will be intensified at the place where the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.

So make the right use of your life, and even if you must endure misery, you will know that it is a good gift, and that all things must work together for good to those who love God.

Not only good gifts, but also perfect gifts come from God. So, secondly, what are these perfect gifts? They cannot be earthly gifts; for these are never perfect. Life is not a perfect gift; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.

Health is not a perfect gift; for we are never sure of it, and disease may fasten upon us at any time. Earthly possessions are not perfect gifts; for thieves may steal them, and we may be deprived of them without warning, and they may do us more harm than good.

Even a good reputation among men is not a perfect gift; for vile tongues may easily destroy our good name and bring us into disrepute. Perfect gifts are not to be sought in the realms of nature, but in the realms of grace. All the gifts which God imparts to us in the realms of His grace are perfect gifts.

The greatest of these perfect gifts is the Word of God, of which the Apostle says, 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.* Is not the Word of God a perfect gift indeed? Heaven and earth shall pass away, but the Word of God endures forever. Is there anything more powerful than the Word of God?

When God said, "*Let there be light,*" there was light. Heaven and earth were made by the Word of God. We read in Psalm 33:6, ⁶ *By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, And all the host of them by the breath of His mouth.*

And have we not been regenerated by the Word of God? Has not the Word of God produced in us this wonderful transformation, that from children of God's wrath we have been turned into children of His love, that we have been brought to the faith, and that Christ's perfect righteousness has been imputed to us?

Has not the Word of God made new creatures of us, whose hearts have been changed, and whose affection is set on those things that are above?

Have we not been regenerated already by the visible Word of God in Holy Baptism, and does not the audible Word of God which is proclaimed to us from the Holy Scriptures continually perform miracles upon our souls, keeping us in the faith, enabling us to do the will of God, strengthening us, and comforting us in all afflictions?

O how we should thank God for this inestimable gift, for His divine Word! Where would we be if we did not have the Word of God? We would be as miserable as miserable can be in this life, and death would bring us into eternal woe.

We would be without all the other perfect gifts of God, without the grace of God, without the forgiveness of our sins, without the Spirit of God, without the hope of eternal life, if God had not given us this perfect gift — His divine Word.

So, do you value, do you appreciate God's Word, my friends? Do you fear and love God that you do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred, and gladly hear and learn it? You have the Bible. Do you read it? Do you learn from it? Do you seek to grow in Christian knowledge? Do you follow the instructions given in the Bible? O let the Word of God be a lamp unto your feet and a light unto your path, and show thereby that you value this perfect gift.

2. His Demands.

Our text, however, tells us not only of gifts, but also of demands of God. This is the second part of our meditation.

What does God demand of us, having extended to us His gifts? Some think that all that God demands of them is their money, their gold and silver. Many a wealthy person has been ready and willing, on his death-bed, to give God all his wealth, when he himself has no more use of it, and expected to make a bargain with God as he had bargained with men, and to buy eternal life with his ill-gotten gain.

A story is told of a rich English lord who lived as the rich man in the Bible did, and never cared for God. But when he saw death approaching, his conscience troubled him, and he quickly made a testament, and willed everything he had to orphan asylums and other benevolent and charitable institutions.

Then he called for a minister, showed him his testament, and said: Will I not get to heaven now? I know that I have not led the life which I should have led, but surely God will receive and accept me as I have given Him so much money. Dear friend, said the minister, what does God care for your money? You surely have done well to remember the poor and the unfortunate in your will, but all your gold and silver will not buy heaven.

Have you not read in the Bible that in heaven the streets are paved with gold and the gates are made of pearls? Money has no value in the consideration of heaven; it is like the dirt on the streets; it takes more than money to obtain heaven.

What God demands of us He plainly states in the Book of Proverbs where He says in Proverbs 23:26, ²⁶ *My son, give me your heart, And let your eyes observe my ways.* What God demands of us is our hearts, that is, our love, and our affection.

By nature our hearts are void of the love of God. By nature we love everything else but God. Our hearts must undergo a radical change. We must be born again. We must be made the children of God, and that is done by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, who died on the cross for our sins, and gained for us eternal life.

If in true faith we have tasted of God's love to us in Christ, we will say: Let us love Him, for He first loved us. We will ask what God demands of us that we might observe His ways. A few of these demands of God are stated in our text.

The Apostle says, ¹⁹ *So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; ²⁰ for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.*

Be swift to hear! We must remember that the Apostle had just referred to the Word of Truth, the Word of God, by which we are made a kind of firstfruits of His creatures. Be swift to hear the Word of God! Jesus says in Luke 11:28, *blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!*" And the Apostle says *So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*²

Be slow to speak! Guard your tongue! In the third chapter of his Epistle, James says, *no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly*

poison. ⁹ With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. ¹⁰ Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so.

Be slow to wrath! Let not your temper get away with you! We may have all the cause in the world to get angry, but if we are the children of our heavenly Father, we will receive power from on high to control ourselves, to subdue our passions, and not to forget ourselves, and say and do things which should not be said and done because they are sinful.

The Apostle continues, ²¹ *Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.*

Lay aside, that is, put aside all filthiness. See that according to the Sixth Commandment you lead a chaste and decent life in word and deed. Lay aside or put aside all naughtiness, that is, all maliciousness, which seeks to harm and injure the neighbour in some way. Peter says in his First Epistle, ¹ *Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, ² as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby.*³

Receive with meekness the engrafted Word! When the Word of God has been engrafted upon you, when it has been implanted in you, when you have received it into your heart, see that in a good and honest heart you preserve this heavenly treasure. Ponder over it, weigh in your mind during the week what you have heard in the house of God on Sunday, and be careful that you do not harden your heart against the divine Word when it strikes you and reveals to you your hidden sin to which you are subject.

Receive the Word with meekness, and let the Word induce you to amend your sinful life and to do better. Then you will profit by the Word of God which you have heard, and finally receive the salvation of the soul, if faithfully you remain under the influence of the divine Word.

See, my friends, this is what the Father of lights, the Giver of every good and every perfect gift, demands of you. May He grant us all His grace that we be doers of the Word, and not hearers only, and finally receive us all to Himself in heaven, where we shall see Him face to face and live with Him eternally. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ 1 Timothy 6:16

² Romans 10:17

³ 1 Peter 2:1-2