

God's Marvellous Gifts

"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17 - KJV).

James the half-brother of Jesus, in this one verse, gives us a beautiful commentary on the nature and power of God. It is not unusual for people who fall into sin to blame God instead of themselves. They say in effect, to their Creator, "Why have you made me like this?" But this is a form of self deception. In contrast to Satan, sin and death, discussed in verses 13-15, James does not want us to be deceived. He points out that the very nature of God prohibits him from ever doing anything that is evil. God gives good gifts. Only good gifts come from God.

In the days of the Bible, times of great joy were often accompanied by the giving of gifts, to one another (e.g. Nehemiah 8:10; Esther 9:22; Revelation 11:10). This ancient custom, practiced commonly in all nations throughout history, finds its greatest expression at Christmas time, when the joy of the wise men (Matthew 2:10) and the joyful tidings of the angels (Luke 2:10) echo in millions of family circles around the world and even where Christ Himself is not known, people share the joy of giving.

The Gift of Creation - James 1:17

Though human gifts may be imperfect, only good and perfect gifts come from above, "from the Father of lights." The marvelous universe itself, which came from the creative hand of God, the great Giver, was good and perfect. In the Old Testament portion of His inspired Word, we read about Him and His creation (Psalm 19:1-7; 119:89). God is not like the planets He has created. They are undergoing constant change. Unlike the shadow on a sundial that indicates change, with Him there is "no shadow of turning." He is not fickle or capricious. God is not only invariable in essence; He is unchanging in nature and His word is trustworthy.

James is pointing out, that since God gives good gifts only, it is unthinkable that He could or would ever entice man to sin, as argued in James 1:13.

Temptation comes from man's own sinful nature. In contrast, every gift from God is a good gift and a perfect gift!

The Gift of Light - James 1:17

The words "give," "giving," "gift" and other such words occur at least 2,100 times in the Bible. The very first occurrence, however, is in connection with the giving of light. God placed the great lights in the heavens "to give light upon the earth" (Genesis 1:15).

Light is the basic energy by which all creation functions, but so far as the earth is concerned, it is the particular light from the sun which energizes all earth's processes. God Himself is the Light (1 John 1:5; 1 Timothy 6:15 - 16, Revelation 22:5) and that light antedates the sun. Since God made the "lights" of the universe, He is to be recognized as the *Father of lights* (James 1:17).

Just as joyful celebrations commonly involve gift-giving, so they often include many lights. When Christ came into the world, the shepherds saw a great light shining (Luke 2:9), the wise men saw His star (Matthew 2:2) and John testified that the "true Light" had come (John 1:9).

Today, the remembrance of His birth is everywhere marked by an abundance of lights. Even the Jewish festival of Hanukkah, observed concurrently with Christmas, is called by them the "festival of lights."

The Other Gifts of God

Our purpose in this study is not to do a comprehensive study of the Biblical theme of giving, but to examine the specific use of the words - "gift of God" - that are listed as such in the Scriptures.

In the Old Testament, the emphasis is often on God's material blessings. The words 'gift of God' are only used in two references in Ecclesiastes. (Ecclesiastes 3:13, 5:19). "When God gives any man wealth and

possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work--this is a gift of God" (Ecclesiastes 5:19).

This shows that even our talents, abilities or possessions are, in the deepest sense, the gifts of God's grace. We owe everything to Him.

Spiritual blessings are far more important than physical and material blessings and there are six New Testament occurrences of this phrase, the "gift of God", which we will now examine.

God's Spiritual Gifts in the NT

1. The Gift of Christ Himself

"If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water" (John 4:10).

This is a reference to Jesus himself as the one sent from God to give spiritual life. (John 10:28 -29)

2. The Gift of the Holy Spirit

"When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money. Peter answered: "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money!" (Acts 8:18-20). This is a unique passage, but it clearly teaches that the Holy Spirit is a gift from God (John 14:16-17).

3. The Gift of Eternal Life

"The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

Sin results in death (James 1:15), but God promises deliverance and the free gift of eternal life to all who take it. This eternal life starts now and will continue after a future resurrection - in a new heavenly body.

4. The Gift of Individual Personal Abilities

"Each man has his own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that" (1 Corinthians 7:7).

To his own children, God gives the power to do things beyond their natural abilities. The Holy Spirit gives Spiritual Gifts for service (Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4, 1 Peter 4).

5. The Gift of Salvation through Faith

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--" (Ephesians 2:8).

Clearly Salvation cannot be earned by any type of human effort or good deeds. It is a gift to be received by personal faith in Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12).

6. The Gift of Confident Love

"I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you. For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind" (2 Timothy 1:6,7).

Sometimes, Christians get fearful, worried and anxious. They need to be reminded that God has given them His Holy Spirit to enable them to face all situations under His loving control (Galatians 5:22).

The Permanence of God's Gifts

If all of the gifts of God are good and perfect, it is no surprise that they are eternal. It is significant that the sole occurrence of the plural "gifts of God" stresses this wonderful truth. "God's gifts and His call are irrevocable" (Romans 11:29). Every one of these gifts of God will be ours to treasure throughout eternity. They never change!

God the Constant Giver

It is interesting to note that the last mention of giving in the Bible has to do with the rewards which Christ will give His faithful servants at His return. "Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me,

and I will give to everyone (of mine) according to what he has done" (Revelation 22:12). He is the great Giver, from the first chapter of Genesis to the last chapter of Revelation!

Therefore, as we share God's gifts with others, let us be sure to remember the Father of lights and the greatest of all His good and perfect gifts.

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

Remember, for gifts to be meaningful they must be received by those to whom they are offered. Have you received Jesus into your life? If not, then pray and ask Jesus to be your Lord and Savior. He will give you a life of love and joy.

Then, after contemplating God's great gift and the love that determined it, we can respond only in praise and wonder: "Thank God for His Son - a gift too wonderful for words!" (2 Corinthians 9:15).

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