

James

God Is Good

July 31, 2011

I. Introduction

A. **James 1:12-18** . . . Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. [13] Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. [14] But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. [15] Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. [16] Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. [17] Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow. [18] In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.

B. Prayer

II. Only God Is Good

A. **James 1:16** . . . Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.

1. The only reason to include this warning is because some of God's people are being deceived into thinking God is less than good, that there is some evil in Him, that He isn't always acting in our best interests, that He doesn't always have our well-being in mind, and that He allows things or does things that make life harder or even hurt us.
 - a. We may never say these kinds of things out loud, yet we think things and say things and do things that imply God has failed us in some way, which in turn implies He lacks perfect goodness, or that there is some darkness in Him.
 - b. An example of weakness in this area is the way many Christians read Job and wonder at what God did. They don't see man's weakness and frailty or our pride and even arrogance as it is exposed against the backdrop of God's glory or greatness. And for sure they don't see what an immense privilege it is to have a share in bringing glory to God – even if it means passing through a time of tribulation and suffering to do so.
 - c. Rather they either see suffering and sadness and great loss, or they skip over that part and dream about how wonderful it would

be to have God pour out on them the same portion of material blessings He heaped on Job after Job's trial was completed.

(1) Now of course, when we only look at Job's suffering, it can seem irrational and unexplainable – which would prompt any of us to think that God is not perfectly good.

(2) And if we focus our eyes on the rich blessings God bestowed on Job at the end of his time of trial, we will expect God to do for us what He did for Job – minus the suffering, of course. And if God fails to bless us like He blessed Job, we will be powerfully inclined to think that God has failed us in some way.

2. My point here is that thinking less of God than we ought is a problem among Christians, and we must be on our guard against any lies or even heart-breaking stories that infer God is not perfectly good. And so I am urging us today to cling to the truth about God – personally, and as a church. Encourage one another to see the goodness of God and to believe that God is only and wholly good and just and righteous and pure and loving and kind, especially when one or more of us is going through a time of suffering, trial, and temptation.

B. If we are going to speak of anyone as having a dark side, we ought to be speaking against the devil. If we are going to speak against anyone's character or say that anyone has evil intentions, we ought to be saying such things about the devil. If anyone is actively working against our good, it is the devil. If anyone is seeking to take advantage of us, if anyone is wanting deceive us and work us harm, it is the devil.

1. The Scripture describes the devil as:

- a. A dragon, a serpent (of old), an accuser, someone who is diabolical (*devil*), and as an adversary and enemy (*Satan*). **Revelation 12:7-9**
- b. Beelzebul the ruler of the demons. **Matthew 12:24**
- c. The ruler of this world – who will be cast out. **John 12:31**
- d. The god of this world – who is blinding the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ. **II Corinthians 4:3-4**
- e. The prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. **Ephesians 2:1-2**
- f. The evil one. **I John 5:18**
- g. A roaring lion prowling about seeking someone to devour. **I Peter 5:8**

- h. A murderer, a liar, and the father of lies. **John 8:44**
 - i. The accuser of our brethren before God. And he is active in this role day and night. **Revelation 12:10**
 - j. One who binds people with sickness, disease, and other physical maladies. **Luke 13:12-16** . . . When Jesus saw her, He called her over and said to her, "Woman, you are freed from your sickness." [13] And He laid His hands on her; and immediately she was made erect again and began glorifying God. [14] But the synagogue official, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, began saying to the crowd in response, "There are six days in which work should be done; so come during them and get healed, and not on the Sabbath day." [15] But the Lord answered him and said, "You hypocrites, does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the stall and lead him away to water him? [16] "And this woman, a daughter of Abraham as she is, whom **Satan has bound for eighteen long years**, should she not have been released from this bond on the Sabbath day?"
2. Once again let me remind you that God is cautioning us against being deceived into thinking or believing that there is any evil in Him. The evil one is Satan, who uses immediate gratification – or what we might call **so-called good gifts** – to ensnare us so he can then turn us against God, weaken us spiritually, harm us emotionally, mentally, and physically, and eventually destroy us.
 - a. You see, the devil cares nothing about making you happy or helping you feel better or doing any good for you whatsoever.
 - b. All his hopes and plans and purposes and actions point in one direction, and one direction only – your destruction and eternal damnation.
 3. In contrast to the devil's evil intentions we have God, who only does what is good for everyone – and this leads us to **James 1:17**.
- C. **James 1:17** . . . Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.
1. One of the reasons we are tempted to think God is NOT perfectly good is because some, or maybe even much of the good God does for us begins with or includes trials, tribulation, testing, and even terrible suffering on our part. So how can God be perfectly good and allow or plan such things for us? To understand how every good thing given

and perfect gift can include hard things and even suffering, we must take two facts into account.

- a. First, God uses trials, tribulation, suffering, persecution, rejection, and other such things to both transform us from babes in Christ to mature believers, and to build His kingdom through us, and in those who are observing us and being affected by our choices and behavior.
 - b. Second, the hard times God puts us through are no more the whole of what He is doing or has in store for us than the gratifying times the devil gives us when we do his bidding. This means that if we are going to see and understand a fuller, more comprehensive view of God's goodness, we must be willing to look beyond the immediate, and refuse to treat what is happening to us today as if it were the whole or the end result of what God is doing.
2. Let me give you some examples to show you what I mean by needing to see the big picture if we are to gain a fuller, more comprehensive understanding of God's goodness in the real world.
- a. **Galatians 3:13-14** . . . Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"—[14] in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.
 - (1) Jesus not only suffered physical pain and death. He, the Holy Lamb of God, the Spotless, Unblemished Sacrifice, suffered the curse of the Law and the public shame that went with that curse. And Christ did this while we were yet sinners—still in open and willful rebellion against God.
 - (2) But look at the good that came from Christ's suffering! In fact, we treasure His suffering because it has worked such a mighty good for us. And we treasure it so much that we write songs and books and preach sermons and give public praise concerning His suffering and how it has blessed us. And yet, our blessing came at a great cost to both God and His son, Jesus Christ.
 - (3) Was the suffering God and Christ endured at the cross the whole of the story? Was it the result of an imperfect God who failed to protect His son? Was the suffering wasted? No! No! No! God was working a great good through the suffering, and we are the recipients of that great good—a good that will last throughout eternity.

- (4) Now if God and Jesus suffered for our sake, for our salvation and eternal well-being, is it not reasonable that we should be willing to suffer the transforming trials and tribulations for their sake?
- b. **Thomas a-Kempis:** Jesus has many lovers of His heavenly kingdom, but few bearers of His Cross. He has many seekers of a comfortable life, but few who treasure trials and tribulation for the spiritual growth that is gained through them. He finds many at His communion table, but few who join Him in fasting and prayer. All want to be part of praising Him in worship and rejoicing over the miraculous deeds He has done. Few want to endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. Many follow Jesus because of what He will do for them, but few in order to share in His sufferings or to endure martyrdom for the honor of His name.
- (1) Yet in the way of the Cross there is mental, emotional, and spiritual health. In the way of the Cross there is true security and protection. The way of the Cross produces an inner peace and heavenly joy that is beyond description, regardless of the circumstances. The way of the Cross nurtures sensible thinking, strong convictions, worthy values, and perseverance to the end. In the way of the Cross there is fulness of the Holy Spirit. And the way of the Cross produces mature godliness and whole-hearted, whole-life holiness.
- (2) Do not let anyone deceive you on this matter: there is no spiritual health and no hope of eternal life apart from the Cross (*sharing in the sufferings*) of Christ. Therefore, take up your cross and follow Jesus. Die to sin and self, and come alive to God in Christ Jesus (**Romans 6:11**). No longer live for yourself, but live for Him who died and rose again on your behalf (**II Corinthians 5:15**). Then you will go with Jesus on into eternal life (**II Timothy 2:11**). Indeed, He has shown us the way by bearing His cross and dying for us upon the Cross. True, He did this for our salvation, but He also did this to set an example so that we would follow in His steps – bearing our cross, and cherishing the privilege to crucify our flesh upon it. For if we die with Him, we shall also live with Him for eternity (**Romans 6:5-7**). And if we share in His sufferings, we shall also share in His glory (**I Peter 4:12-14**).

c. **Hebrews 12:5-6** . . . My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reprov'd by Him; [6] for those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives. **Hebrews 12:10-11** . . . For [our parents] disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. [11] All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

(1) Love refuses to spoil or feed the selfish interests of a child or an adult. And such is the love of God toward us. Because God loves us – and because He is holy, He refuses to ruin us in relation to eternal life, righteousness, and living peaceably with all those who call on God from a pure heart. Therefore, God disciplines us. And as the scripture says, discipline is uncomfortable, hard, demanding, and even painful.

(2) Yet God's discipline leads to two stated great outcomes:

(a) Sharing in God's holiness – or being holy as He is holy. And we know what a gracious gift and precious treasure such help in becoming holy is, for the scripture says that "everyone who has the hope [of seeing Christ face-to-face] purifies himself, just as He is pure" (**I John 3:3**).

(b) Gaining the peaceful fruit of righteousness – the fruit spoken of here is not righteousness, but the fruit of righteousness, which is peace with God, peace within, and peace with those around you – as much as it depends on you.

d. **Galatians 5:24** . . . Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

3. The point I am trying to make here is that only God is perfectly good and only God gives perfectly good gifts to us. True, His gift giving includes times of trials, tribulation, testing, and discipline. And His gift giving allows times of temptation. But, His giving is always and only directed toward our immediate, mental, emotional, spiritual, and eternal good. Do you trust Him in this way? Will you trust Him?

D. **James 1:18** . . . In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.

1. This is a summary statement about the goodness of God! It shows God's intentions for us, even as He created us as part of His creation of the heavens and the earth and all the living creatures who dwell in heaven and on the earth.
2. **In the exercise of His will:**
 - a. Life has been God's intention for us from the beginning. He created us, and we come to life through the process of birth, which means we have a beginning. But by God's will and doing, we are born to live forever – with the intention that we will live in righteousness with God forever. As the scripture says, God takes no pleasure in the [eternal damnation] of the wicked (Ezekiel 33:11). His joy, His pleasure, His intention is that all of us enter into eternal life and live with Him forever.
 - b. **I Peter 1:3** . . . Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, [4] to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you.
 - c. In other words, it is by God's good will, or His goodness, alone, that we were created and then redeemed from our rebellious condition so we can be reconciled to God and live with Him forever.
3. **He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.**
 - a. In other words, God not only spoke life here on earth into existence, He spoke eternal life for us into existence and freely gave the Living Word – Jesus Christ – so we, rebellious sinners deserving eternal damnation, could be redeemed, transformed, and raised to the top rung of His created ladder of creatures.
 - b. This is the goodness of God. May we exercise our faith in Him in ways that honor His goodness!

III. Conclusion

- A. The devil is darkness, and in him there is no goodness at all. All his intentions and actions have our destruction and demise as their supreme goal. May we see through his lies and run from his wiles.
- B. God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. God is good, and in Him there is no evil of any kind. He works good in all He does, and we are the recipients of His goodness. May we praise Him for this now and throughout eternity.