

Good Gifts Come From Above **James 1:16-21**

Grace to you and peace, from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

James, inspired by the Holy Spirit, writes. *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.*

The first think we think of when we think of good and perfect gifts coming from above, is that He gives us everything concerning the cares and needs of this body and life. Yes, we think of all our earthly needs when we think of the good gifts that come from above. We think of them being fulfilled by God. Sometimes we may even wonder why we don't have it as well as some who are not believers. But God causes the rain to fall on the just and the unjust. And Satan likes to make it difficult for the believers.

We can go to the Small Catechism and see this reflected in Luther's words of his explanation to the 1st Article of the Creed. *I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.*

What does this mean?

I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still takes care of them. He also gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all I have. He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life. He defends me against all danger and guards and protects me from all evil. All this He does only out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me. For all this it is my duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him. This is most certainly true.

Let's take a moment to consider all that they Lord has blessed us with. *He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still takes care of them.* Your body, your brain, you ability to use them - that's all God's gift to you. Do you use them to bring glory to God? Do you use them, as God intended, to the benefit of your neighbor?

I think it is safe to say that is not always the truth. We may get lazy at times, not using our talents to the best of our ability. There are times we see others in need and may think, "good for them, they deserve it." Other times, we may not even consider their need and never lift a finger to help another one which He sent His Son to redeem.

Sometimes, we use parts of the body God has given us for downright evil. I think of the mouth, and how often that little portion of the body can bring irreparable harm. Instead of praying for those in need, we speak evil of our neighbor. We tell of their "dirty little secrets" when we should be helping them overcome them. We hear a little rumor and pass it on, without even finding out if it is true. How our mouths can ruin someone's reputation.

Instead, maybe our mouths might be better used to serve God if they were opened in prayer for our neighbor. Or, if someone speaks evil of another, we defend them. And, if we cannot

defend them, simply keep our mouths shut and not spread the evil any further.

There are still more gifts that come down from above. *He also gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all I have. He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life.*

Yeah, I know, you work hard for your money... But we already established that your talents and abilities are God's gifts to you. The opportunity for a job is by His blessing. And even when things get tough, He provides somehow.

I look at Pauline, Nathan, and Timothy. They are God's gifts to me. My sons are not my own. In this regard, I have an obligation to God to be a faithful spouse and a good father - those are stewardship vocations - ways in which I care for His gifts to me. And in turn, through me, He cares for them. Yes, I am the one who takes care of them. But, if I were no longer here, God would take care of them by other means - of that I am convinced. While they are mine, how I manage my family either gives glory to God - or shames His name. As a good father and husband, it is a reflection on God. When I fail in those duties, it is a disgrace to God's holy name.

All that you and I have is a gift of God from above. How we use all that God gives us is a reflection on whether we truly believe that or not. How we use our gifts in God's church is one aspect of that. Are we generous to use our talents, our time, and our treasures in God's church? Or are we stingy and reluctant. They are His gifts to us, and only for us to use, for we will not keep them forever. Do we acknowledge His gifts, returning a portion of them all in service to Him?

Do not forget as well, that our daily life, and how we interact and serve our neighbor is also a service to God. And this is not simply going out of our way to help our neighbor. The farmer, using his talents and the gifts of land and animals, helps to feed his neighbor. And the trucker serves his neighbor by bringing those goods to market. A police officer uses his peculiar gifts to protect and thereby serve his neighbor. Contractors build homes and fix them to provide shelter to their neighbor. Yes, each person, in their own special vocation, uses their talents to the benefit of their neighbor and to bring glory to God.

A wise man recognizes God's gifts. A wiser man recognizes this and thanks God for them. And the wisest of men recognizing God's gracious gifts, also goes about prayerfully using them, giving thanks and praise to God.

But you know what, we haven't addressed something yet. Good are the gifts God provides for our earthly well-being, but are they the best gifts?

Listen again. *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creation.*

Of His own will, He brought us forth by the word of truth. You and I dear friends, are not just

human being with physical and earthly blessings, but we are something different - we are brought forth by the Word of truth. We are God's redeemed children.

The good and perfect gifts came from above, they were bound up in the person and work of Jesus Christ, His beloved Son. Enfleshed as a man, His life upon earth was a perfect gift to all those around Him, for He did everything - in word and deed - for the benefit of His neighbor, and by it all brought glory to His Father.

His flesh was the perfection of God's gifts from heaven when He sacrificed Himself upon the cross. He purchased our redemption from bondage to the pleasures and selfishness of our sinful flesh - for those times we did not use all that He has given us to the benefit of our neighbor, and when we brought shame to His name.

It is this Christ, who is Himself *The Truth* who brings us forth, being born again of water and the Spirit in baptism. Good and perfect gifts are given in the miracle of baptism, for in it we are redeemed from death by being united to His death, granting us the forgiveness of sins. As He was raised to life, we too are given new life - here and for eternity.

What a good and perfect gift sits on the table today. We see the earthly blessings of God in the elements of bread and wine, but the Word of Truth, Christ Himself will transform those simple things that they might bestow upon us even great benefits. When we gather at this table, we will eat and drink the very body and blood of Christ given upon the tree. This meal not only gives forgiveness, life, and salvation - but strengthens us in the true faith - to live as His beloved Christ.

It is the Word of truth that brought us forth into this place today. The Spirit guided your footsteps into this building that you might receive the good and perfect gifts from above - the gifts that prepare you to live as a kind of firstfruits *in* His creation, now and forevermore.

Let us give thanks to God for every good and perfect gift that comes down from above - from the Father, through the Son, by the Holy Spirit. Amen.