



The Voice Of Truth

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God Gives Us Every Good Gift

By Mike Willis

The adversities of life that come to us sometimes tempt us to think that God is the source of the evils. As some men suffer, they may blame God, just as Job did when he wrote,

But now he hath made me weary; thou hast made desolate all my company. And thou hast filled me with wrinkles, which is a witness against me; and my leanness rising up in me beareth witness to my face. He teareth me in his wrath, who hateth me: he gnasheth upon me with his teeth; mine enemy sharpeneth his eyes upon me. They have gaped upon me with their mouth; they have smitten me upon the cheek reproachfully; they have gathered themselves together against me. God hath delivered me to the ungodly, and turned me over into the hands of the wicked. I was at ease, but he hath broken me asunder: he hath also taken me by my neck, and shaken me to pieces, and set me up for his mark. His archers compass me round about, he cleaveth my reins asunder, and sloth not spare; he poureth out my gall upon the ground (Job 16:7-13).

Job's statements about God's dealing with him were wrong, as the book continues to demonstrate. In the New Testament, James reminds us of the same truth, that our temptations do not come from God, but have another source (which we may or may not be able to explain). We need to be reminded of the nature of the God that we serve. James wrote, "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" (1:17). He did not want us to think of God in the terms that Job did. Let's consider some of the things spoken in James 1.

Every Good and Perfect Gift Comes From God (1:17)

Inasmuch as men are tempted to look on our suffering as having God as its origin, we need to be reminded that suffering has Satan as its origin. God is the giver of every good and perfect gift (1:17). Here are some of God's good gifts: (a) His provisions for man's physical needs; (b) His

sustaining of the world; (c) Our daily provisions of food, clothing, and shelter; (d) His gift of the family; (e) His gift of government. On top of these physical provisions, think of God's spiritual provisions for man: (a) The Savior; (b) The revealed word of God; (c) Prayer; (d) The local church; (e) The hope of heaven. The list could be extended much beyond what it is.

James reminds us that the nature of God is unchangeable (1:17). There is not one parallax ("variation, change," Thayer 484) or tropes ("a turning: of the heavenly bodies," Thayer 631) or apokiasma ("a shade cast by one object upon another, a shadow," Thayer 67). The way God acts on one occasion does not cast a shadow on his otherwise revealed nature, as if he was acting one way at one time and another way at another time. God is the same yesterday, today and forever (Heb. 13:8). If these good gifts remind us of God's good nature, and they do, we should remember that his nature does not change because we happen to suffer some adversity, such as Job suffered (loss of family members, wealth, position in society, or physical health). Whatever explanation lies as the reason for human suffering, one can never question the goodness and love of God. God's disposition toward man was clearly revealed in the gift of his Son for man's salvation.

How to Consider Our Circumstances

Bad times do come for men. Every person and family experiences hard times. How should we view them? Here are some biblical answers to that question:

1. As testing of one's faith (1:2-4). Remember the example of Job. The Devil slanderously charged that Job was serving God for his own benefit. The things that happened to him tested his faith. In the course of his suffering, he experienced the following circumstances: (a) Financial reversal; (b) Loss of his children; (c) Loss of social position; (d) Loss of physical health. Although Job thought God was to blame

for his sufferings and bitterly complained to God, the Lord was not the one attacking Job. The Devil was attacking Job to see if he could use these circumstances to destroy his faith. He had slanderously accused Job of serving God because God had put a fence around him. God allowed Satan to tempt Job. From God's point of view, these circumstances tested Job's faith. When similar temptations come to us, we should look on them as testing one's faith. James said, "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing" (Jas. 1:2-4).

We recognize that a tested faith works "patience" (hupomonē : "steadfastness, constancy, endurance... ; in the N.T. the characteristic of a man who is unswerved from his deliberate purpose and his loyalty to faith and piety by even the greatest trials and sufferings," Thayer 644). Steadfastness produces its work of making man "perfect" (teleios) and "entire" (holokros : "complete in all its parts, in no part wanting or unsound, complete, entire, whole," Thayer 443).

We count it joy when we have successfully endured the temptation (cf. Heb. 12:1-2). In the midst of such suffering, one may lack wisdom. In such an event he should ask God to give wisdom to him (Jas. 1:5).

2. As a discipline to improve him (Heb. 12:5-11). The writer of Hebrews reminds us that the Lord's chastening (used in that context with reference to physical persecution of Christians) had a positive effect of disciplining and chastising the soul. His chastening produces the positive effect that we might be exercised in righteousness. Our sufferings also discipline our soul. Paul said that his thorn in the flesh was there to keep him from pride (2 Cor. 12:7).

3. As an allurement of the devil to induce him to sin. Whereas the Lord allows temptations to test one's faith, the Devil uses the same temptations to destroy his soul. His attacks against Job were malicious. He wanted the things that he inflicted on Job to cause him to "curse God and die." The Devil still uses ill circumstances to tempt us to believe that God does not love or care for us, leading us to quit serving him.

The Man Who Successfully Endures Temptation

1. Shall receive the crown of life (1:12). James said, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him" (1:12). The successful endurance of one's adversities leads to approval from God and, ultimately, to the crown of life. God rewards those who are faithful to him (cf. Rev. 2:10; 2 Tim. 4:6-8).

2. Does not attribute his temptations to sin to God (1:12-15). James wrote,

Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man:

But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.

Our temptations to commit evil cannot come from a good God. God cannot be tempted with evil. God tempts no one. Our temptations stem from our own lusts. Epithumia means "desire, craving, longing. . . spec. desire for what is forbid-den, lust" (Thayer 238). There is an unholy desire for that which is forbidden in a man. The devil entices that unholy desire. Our lusts give birth to sin. Sin gives birth to spiritual death. In none of this sequence is God luring one to fulfill his forbidden desires, his lusts.

We can illustrate how that works. A man may be tempted by the devil in that which there is no lustful desire. I am not tempted by such things as homosexuality, drunkenness, robbing a bank, committing a murder, etc. However, I have been susceptible to the devil's enticements in other areas. He has successfully appealed to my sexual passions to get me to watch things on TV that I should not have watched, provoked my anger to use language that I should not have used, and such like things. Were there no lustful desire in me, I would not respond to his allurements.

In the hour of trial or testing, one should remember that these sufferings do not come from the good God. There is a great danger of murmuring and complaining in adverse circumstances, rather than submitting one's spirit to God (1 Cor. 10:10).

The Danger of Sinful Anger (1:19-20)

James warned about the danger that comes to one's soul from a sinful anger in the face of his temptations. He wrote, "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God."

In the midst of suffering there is a danger of sinning in anger. The word anger is translated from orgē which means, "The natural disposition, temper, character; movement or agitation of soul, impulse, desire, any violent emotion, but esp. (and chiefly in Attic) anger. In bibl. Grk. anger wrath indignation" (Thayer 452). In the midst of such anger one may be prone to say things he should not and do things that he will regret. Hence, James admonishes that men should be (a) swift to hear, (b) slow to speak, and (c) slow to wrath. Sinful wrath does not produce the righteousness of God.

Satan has destroyed many a man by adverse circumstances that drive him to bitterness of spirit and blasphemous words against the good God. James is calling on Christians to remember that God is a good God, whose good and perfect gifts amply demonstrate his good character. Since he can do nothing inconsistent with his good nature, man should not allow his adversities to drive him away from God.

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