

“Every Good Gift”
James 1:16-18
Sunday, October 31st, 2021

Pastor and author John Piper has said that he is thankful for the gift of biographies. Indeed, so am I. Given today's text of Scripture, especially **James 1:17**, and the fact this is the 504th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation, we'll be examining throughout this message the biographies of some of the people who were instrumental in the Reformation.

Augustine lived in North Africa from 354 AD to 430 AD. His full name was Aurelius Augustinus Hipponensis, but you can call him Augustine of Hippo. He lived long before the Reformation. He wrote many books. He loved to write about the amazing grace of God and all the good things God gives us.

When Augustine was a very old man, he could no longer hold a Bible in his hands and he could no longer see the tiny print on the page. His assistants came along to help. They painted verses from the Psalms across the walls and all along the ceiling of his bedroom.

One thousand years after he lived, the church drifted far away from proclaiming the amazing grace of God. Then along came a German monk named Martin Luther. He started reading the books of Augustine. Like Augustine, Luther started reading the Bible too. What would soon happen would change the world forever.

I realize what I'm about to say may not be popular with everyone. But that which is most important today - October 31st - is what took place 504 years ago today, October 31st, 1517. On that date, Martin Luther, an Augustinian monk, desiring to debate with some teachers in the church. He couldn't have known the impact of tacking a paper on the large doors of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany.

We're in the midst of a sermon series working our way through the New Testament Book of James. I've entitled that sermon series, *Practical Theology*, because it covers many topics in the space of five chapters, all of which are relevant to the church today.

Today, our focus is fully upon God, and how He is represented in the three verses of sacred Scripture before us this morning (**James 1:16-18**). Let's hear God's word speak to us and then we'll look more closely at what He says.

James 1:16-18:

“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.”

We must remember what comes before these verses, which we studied last Sunday morning. The theme was temptation/trials. We discussed how God doesn't tempt us to evil. But He *does* ordain testing so we can grow stronger in our walk with Him. We also saw the process for sin which begins with improper desires that grow into sin and death.

Verse 16 comes on the heels of that - “Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. “ You may ask, *Don't be deceived about what?* A good question! As a good pastor should, James warns his flock not to be deceived by what God has in mind for the trials He presents to us. James' readers shouldn't forget that God doesn't give these trials to drive us away from Him. Rather, He brings us adversity (*doesn't it seem like every football player talks about overcoming adversity?*). And that adversity is designed to draw us to come to God and to fully rely upon Him.

This 16th verse is transitional - a bridge - from verses 12-15 of **James 1** to the rest of today's passage, verses 17-18. “Because of our sin, tests can lead to spiritual death, but God designed them to bring us good. Tests stand among God's gifts, not His curses.” (Dorani, 39)

One of the great verses in **James Chapter 1** is the 17th verse. It, along with verse 18, teaches us many things about God. Here's verse 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.”

This verse teaches us that God is a giving God. Every good gift and every perfect gift comes from Him. Again, the trials God sends our way are among His gifts. And those trials have a good purpose or end.

- With a nod to another portion of verse 17, the Psalmist writes in **Psalms 84:11**, “For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord will give grace and glory; no good *thing* will He withhold from those who walk uprightly.”
- Two verses from **Psalms 37** illustrate that - **Psalms 37:3 & 4**, “Trust in the Lord, and do good; dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness. Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart.” *Isn't that marvelous?* As we find our delight in God, He gives us the very desires of our redeemed hearts.
- In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches His followers about giving when He says, “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!” (**Matthew 7:11**).

God never stops giving, and He never allows us to out-give Him. The ultimate example of God's giving is in His giving us His only begotten Son (Jesus) that we might be forgiven our sins. In addition, He gives the very righteousness of Jesus in the cosmic exchange where we win twice (God forgives our sin and gives us His

righteousness), Jesus takes our sin debt upon Himself, and He gives us His right standing before a holy God.

This verse also teaches us that God is the Father of lights. This points to God's essential nature as light and to His moral goodness. He created light and He is light. That God is light means that He is holy, moral, and just. Darkness cannot exist where there is light.

- **I John 1:5** - "God is light and in Him is no darkness at all."
- Jesus says He is the Light of the World in **John 8:12**, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."
- Returning to the Sermon on the Mount, (**Matthew 5:14-16**), we hear these familiar words of Jesus to His followers, "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all *who are* in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."

My fellow followers of Jesus, we must consider how we reflect the light of God into our homes, schools, workplaces, and businesses. *Do you wall yourself off from everyone else, or do you rub elbows with other Christians, and even those who don't walk with Jesus?* Look at your typical week - if you never shine the light God has given you in salvation with others who are not believers, then something is wrong!

There are many needs in our church and community. *Have you considered running for school board or public office?* There are openings on boards and organizations in our communities - the Churches of Mercer County Food Pantry, the Library board, the Vashti Village board, and Mercer County Historical Center are always looking for help. If you're a military veteran, you can be involved in the American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars. You may be eligible for service with either of these organizations. I find great fulfillment in serving as the Chaplain of both the American Legion and Aledo Fire Department. The schools are always in need of help. There's the retired teachers, women for women, and service organizations like Rotary and Exchange Club and others that exist in the community for others' benefit. All of them are places Christians can...must... shine their light for God's glory.

In the church, we need help with Bible Bunch, Teens in Trinity, kitchen teams, music ministry, and meals on wheels when needed. *Do you realize that our nursery is not yet open?* It's more of a cry room presently. Perhaps more people would attend if they knew there was a staffed nursery to help care for their child while, for perhaps the only hour in the week, they can have some time to themselves, and sit under the preaching of God's Word.

John Wycliffe lived long before the Reformers. He is called the Morning Star of the Reformation. The morning star appears just before sunrise. It's still dark, but when you see the morning star, you know the full light of day is about ready to break into the darkness.

John Wycliffe appeared at a very dark time. Jesus too appeared in a dark time. He told the people that their leaders had put them under a heavy burden. But Jesus said His yoke is easy, and His burden is light. John Wycliffe tried to tell the people of England that very same message. He wanted the English to read a Bible in English and not in Latin. They could not even understand God's Word. Darkness was pervasive all over the land.

The King of England did not like this, and he sent Wycliffe away to the Netherlands. When Wycliffe and his followers arrived, they held church in English and not in Dutch. The burning coals of Reformation were getting hotter.

Finally, this 17th verse also tells us that God does not change. Because God is immovable and rooted, He simply cannot change. Since He is stable and grounded, He can be trusted. Malachi wrote, "For I *am* the Lord, I do not change;" (**Malachi 3:6a**)

Verse 18 teaches that God birthed us ("brought us forth" - a way of saying He "regenerated" us) by the word of His truth. We have the gospel of grace and the sacred Scriptures in the Person of Jesus Christ because He is the One who gave us eternal life. This refers to the sacred Scriptures. The Holy Bible is perhaps the greatest gift of all beside His only begotten Son, Jesus.

Most people who lived before the Reformation didn't have the Bible. They didn't have books at all. Most people couldn't even read or write. Stained glass windows in the churches told the Bible stories. Monks huddled over their desks and copied out books by hand.

Then a man named Johannes Gutenberg built a printing press. The very first book he printed was the Bible. It was beautiful, with hand-painted artwork and big fancy letters. But it was more than beautiful to look at. The Bible was beautiful to read. Bibles were printed in the languages of the people - German for Germans, French for the French, and English for people who speak English.

The Reformers loved the Bible and used it to turn the church back to the right path.

Remembering that James, a Christian man, was writing this letter to Christian Jews who were scattered throughout the known world helps us to understand it properly. Verse 18 shows us it was God's will that we (who are Christians) are to be born again ("brought forth"). It *has* to be His will if we are to have salvation, because we won't seek it unless He makes us alive in Christ.

And you can “be brought forth by the Word,” if you haven’t already. I ask you to make this prayer I’ll lead us through your very own. For those who are living in Jesus, then pray for those who are praying this for the first time. Let’s pray.

Sovereign Lord, You are so gracious to create us so we can enjoy the many things of life on your earth. Yet, we have noticed that there are many things about life that are bad - betrayal, broken promises, crumbling relationships, rebellion, profanity, sex outside of marriage, divorce, abuse, neglect, sickness, injury, and death.

We have embraced those kinds of values of a population in an America that has no idea they are heading straight to hell simply because they want society to turn in their direction.

And, we pray for you to forgive us, and to turn away from our own sinful ways. Forgive us for the life we have lived in opposition to You. And renew us in the way everlasting. Thank you for making us your child in Jesus, Amen.

I pray this examination of these three verses of sacred Scripture excites you about serving a God who has given us every perfect gift. I’m glad we get to do this together.

Martin the Monk was not always a monk. Martin’s father, Hans, was a miner. He worked very hard in the minds to put his son through school. And Martin worked very hard to become a lawyer. One day Martin got stuck in a thunderstorm. He made a vow to God. God kept him safe, and Martin became a monk. But he still did not understand how much God loved him and how much he needed God’s grace,

Martin knew he could not earn his way to heaven - he knew he was a sinner, and he knew even the slightest sin meant he could not meet the Holy God. But he did not know what to do.

Then one day he read these words from Paul’s epistle to the Romans - “The righteous shall live by faith.” That’s it, he thought! He said that we don’t earn our way to heaven. Jesus earned heaven for us by dying on the cross. And there at the cross God meets us.

Martin spoke out against the church. He grabbed his mallet and posted his Ninety-Five Theses to the church door at Wittenberg. He was made to attend the Diet of Worms, an investigation of his theological views. Martin stood against the whole world. But he was standing on God’s Word. Confident in God and God’s message, Luther boldly declared, “Here I stand!”

Luther went on to do many things. He married Katherine Bora and they had many children. He wrote many books and made a German translation of the Bible. He played the lute and

loved to tell jokes. He even wrote hymns, among them today's concluding hymn known affectionately as the "Battle Hymn of the Reformation."