

"HEAR YE HIM"

A Devotional Series For Radio

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The Sermon: EVERY GOOD GIFT IS OF GOD

Scripture: James 1:12-17.

Blessed is the man that resisteth temptation, for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him. Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of (from) 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. Do not err, my beloved brethren. 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.

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above.

All of God's gifts are good. All of God's creations are good. He does not and cannot create moral evil; he does not and cannot give to men any gifts that in and of themselves are morally evil. With him is no variableness or shadow of turning. He cannot be tempted with evil. He does not tempt any man, because to entice a man to do evil would in itself be evil, and in God there is no evil and no darkness. He is the Father of lights, not of darkness. God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. There can be no shadow in light. There can be shadow only when something stands in the way of the light. There can be no darkness, no moral evil in God, or from God.

Every good gift, and every perfect gift, is from God. But any good gift can become evil, if it is used for evil ends. Food may be used to nourish and strengthen men's bodies and enliven their souls; or it may be used primarily to gratify men's gluttonous lusts unto their destruction. Fire may be used to warm and protect men from the cold, and to produce power for the use and benefit of man; or it may be used to kill and destroy. Think of any good gift which God has given to men and you can immediately think of a way in which that gift can be made evil by men who choose to use it for wrong and evil purposes.

The evil in the world, then, comes not from God, but from the evil choices of men. Men are not tempted of God, James says, but are tempted when they are

drawn away by their own lusts and enticed. God does not create men to be evil. He creates them only with the right to choose whether they will be good or evil; and men become evil when they choose to use God's gifts in ways that God did not intend: that is, for evil purposes and selfish, wicked ends.

We sometimes think of Satan or the devil as the source of all evil. If he is, he did not need to be; he was not intended to be. God created Satan, but he did not make him evil, nor did he create him with the purpose or the intent that he should become evil. Satan was first created an angel of light; he was called Lucifer, the Son of the Morning. He was potentially and inherently good. He could have received all the good gifts that God had provided for all the other angels. Like all of God's created beings Lucifer received from God the priceless gift of agency -- the right to make free moral choices for himself. There can be no choice unless there are at least two alternatives between which to choose. Satan could and did choose to use his God-given powers and gifts in morally evil ways. He rebelled against God, and by that rebellion he made himself evil.

"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." God's gifts are many. His grace is manifested in countless ways. His good gifts include all the material resources, all

the laws, all the beneficent processes of the world on which we live, and the universe in which that world rolls. His gifts include the gift of life, our daily food, our friends, and loved ones, his church, our free nation, and all the varied natural talents, capacities, and abilities which are inherent in every man. If a man's heart and mind and will are inclined towards God, the enjoyment of every good gift which God has given will draw him nearer to God. If a man's heart by his own choice is inclined towards evil, every good gift in his hands can become an evil tool with which to destroy himself and others, and to lead him farther and farther from God.

Man in the beginning was neither good nor evil, but innocent, not knowing good from evil, or how to choose between them. He was given the simple right to choose whether to obey God or not. Adam and Eve followed the example and the enticement of Satan, and chose rebellion and disobedience. When the consequences of evil were made apparent to them as a result of this choice, they knew then, as they could not have known before, the difference between good and evil. They lost their innocence, and with their knowledge of evil came guilt, and the consequence of guilt -- death. Their fallen nature and the consequence of their sin have been inherited by all the human race. Each one of us finds in his heart some of the rebellious, evil, and fallen nature which was in Adam.

But if man is inherently evil, because of his own choices as well as because of his inheritance from Adam, he is also inherently good because he is made in the image of God. The God-like portion of his nature urges him to reject evil and to choose righteousness and life. Nevertheless, the consequence of Adam's fall was death for him and all his posterity. Adam's posterity could not choose life, because there was no life to choose unless God should intervene to provide an alternative to death. Because there was no alternative to death, there was no agency -- no possibility of choice.

God did intervene. From the foundation of the world he provided that his

Son should come into the world to redeem man, to make it possible for him to choose life instead of death, to restore his agency by restoring the alternative to death. Every man born into the world, therefore, has the agency which was restored by Christ. He may choose for himself. He may choose to let the good gifts of God draw and entice him towards God, or he may choose to allow the lusts of his own fallen nature entice him into denying the source of those gifts and using them in rebellious, sinful, and morally evil ways.

The devil also gives gifts. But because the devil created nothing, he must of necessity steal, misappropriate, and misuse the gifts of God. He has no creation of his own. He can only use God's creation, by God's sufferance, to bring about evil. He can only take good gifts, and persuade evil men to use them in evil ways. Even though this nearly always brings harm to innocent people, yet God permits it as an expression of man's agency, for agency is precious in God's sight, and there can be no personal stewardship, no moral responsibility, no reward for good, no punishment for evil, unless men are free to choose their acts.

Yes, the devil sometimes gives gifts which are not really his to give, but they are like the cheese in the mouse trap. They promise great enjoyment, great benefit, great pleasure, great reward, but as soon as the gift is taken, it brings death. The devil's gifts seem good, because they were once God's gifts, but when used by the devil and his servants and followers for evil purposes, they end in death.

Every good gift, and every perfect gift comes from above, from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. Every good and perfect gift inclines good men's hearts to God. He who uses God's gifts in evil ways stands in the darkness of his own shadow, and brings upon himself eternal death and alienation from the God who has given such abundant witness of his goodness by the good and perfect gifts he gives to men.