

A Bridge Like No Other

James 1:16-18

The Mackinaw Bridge stands as an architectural marvel spanning the lower and upper peninsulas of our great state. All over the globe there are many and varied types of bridges that allow both motored and foot traffic to cross great gulfs or chasms or rivers and bodies of water.

There are some I am not sure I would venture out on either by car or foot. Some are of modern construction built with the best technology and materials of our day. Others are better left to view as relics of days gone by built with nothing more than rope and boards and in my opinion unsafe to travel because of age, weather and insects.

Back in the days before the Mackinaw Bridge you either had to travel around Chicago up through Wisconsin or take a boat or ferry your car to get into the upper peninsula. Go back even further to the time of Indians and early explorers who paddled canoes across that great expanse. How long did that take? A bridge certainly sped up travel time and served to get you from one point to the other.

Whether it is to span a creek, river, or lake; whether a small gully or a large gulf between two mountains; no matter what era they were built or from what material they were constructed, there is a universal purpose. They serve to get you from one point to another where in some cases it would take hours or perhaps even be impassible.

As we come to our passage in **James 1:16-18**, the first thing we need to notice is that **verse 16** serves as a bridge taking us from one thought of the author to his next thought. The beginning point is the previous section and the opposite point is what we will consider today. We have learned the importance of trials that build our faith. Practically speaking, James is telling us that we shouldn't doubt why God has allowed such testing because they serve to mature our walk with Christ. He even notes that if we doubt God's purpose we shouldn't expect to receive anything from the Lord. Learn to ask for wisdom so that in the test we will come to

understand the long-range plans of maturing us. James puts it in perspective encouraging the believer that no matter what his circumstances, whether rich or poor, consider our standing or position in Christ because what is happening now is only temporary, but our position in Christ is eternal.

He continues by noting that we should consider ourselves blessed or happy when we persevere through those trials because in the end we will receive the crown of life that God has promised.

James then changes course by reminding believers who may have been struggling that God does not tempt anyone. He will test the believer, but He will never tempt the believer. He can't tempt the believer because He cannot be tempted. James then lays out where temptation originates. It comes from within our heart and if left unchecked, it will bring forth sin and when sin is birthed it brings forth death. Essentially what James is saying is that the child of sin is death. **And if God is not the source of temptation, what do we learn about God?** That we will find out in **verses 17-18** where we learn that He is a good God. So we need this bridge in **verse 16** to show us from the previous verses that God is not the source of evil, but that He is the source of what is good because that's His nature. In **verse 16** we see that James gives us a grave command.

I. WE HAVE A GRAVE COMMAND – v. 16

“Don't be deceived, my dear brothers.”

The first thing I want you to see is that this command is imperative.

A. The Command Is Imperative

The word deceive means to be led astray or to cause to wander. The word here is in the passive voice meaning that there is an outside influence that is creating the deception. Although the believer is dead to sin there is still a latent power within the believer of the old nature that is causing him or her to be led astray down the wrong path in regard to sin. James is warning the believer not to be led astray from the right path and in this case, the right path of truth. Don't let the world, the flesh and the

devil steer you wrong. That's what the devil did with Eve back in the garden by getting her to think that the wrong path was actually the right path. We will learn in **James 5:19** that straying in a spiritual sense happens when we don't adhere to the truth. The spiritual truth before us in our passage is that God doesn't tempt but only brings good.

So when James tells his readers **"don't be deceived"** he says so in the present imperative which literally means stop an action that is already in progress or it can also mean don't even start. When you look at the previous verses this warning could be that they should stop deceiving themselves to think that God tempts believers or don't even begin to be deceived that God somehow tempts. James says stop already. He's not making a suggestion. It's a command. He is demanding that they not be led astray by wrong thinking and erroneous theology. It's imperative.

The second thing we see about the command is that it's intentional.

B. The Command Is Intentional

We try to be intentional when raising our children. We tell them not to play with scissors, don't touch a hot burner, and don't stick something metal in an outlet.

James intentionally wanted to get these believers to stop believing something that wasn't true about God and accept responsibility for their own sin. To put it another way, he wanted them to start thinking about what was true, something that should motivate them to grow in their walk of faith in Christ rather than thinking about something that would cause them to question God.

As the nation of Israel was preparing to enter the Promised Land, Moses reminded them to **"Love the Lord your God and keep His requirements, His decrees, His laws and His commands always...Be careful (KJV – Beware), or you will be enticed to turn away and worship other gods and bow down to them."** (Deuteronomy 11:1, 16)

The command by James is to stir within these

believers a love for truth and for God, to motivate them to godly living in spite of the trials and to learn from the temptations what to avoid so that it does not lead them to sin. It is intentional.

The command is also impartial.

C. The Command Is Impartial

Though this letter is written to Jewish believers scattered among the nations, this command is universal in scope. It's to all believers, not just a select few. It's to all believers not just then but now. We all face trials of many kinds. We all face temptations of many kinds. We all have within us the propensity to cast blame and sometimes to cast blame on God that He allowed the temptation so we can then justify our sin as somehow God's fault, when James tells all believers to stop already. This command is for every believer so that we don't deceive ourselves. Scripture is for every believer in every generation of every culture.

So if the command is impartial, that leaves us with only two options: obey or disobey. If we choose to obey the command it comes with an implication.

D. The Command Has An Implication

The implication is this: keeping this command calls for supernatural enablement.

Philippians 4:13 "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

Galatians 5:16-17, 24-26

Ephesians 6:10-13

II Peter 1:3-4

We are going through the book Impossible Commands in our men's Bible study, discussing things like what it means to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength; how to rejoice in the Lord always and what it means to be perfect. Those are just a few of the topics we are covering. They seem impossible and in our own strength they are. The author writes **"Honestly facing up to the impossibility of my own obedience leads me not to despair but to the God who is able to do all things."**

There is an important truth we are learning as we study each of these impossible commands and it's this: When God gives us a command, He also gives us the supernatural ability through the indwelling, enabling and empowering Holy Spirit to obey the command.

Galatians 2:20 "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave His life for me."

That's powerful stuff. So with this command before us not to be deceived about the source of temptation or in overcoming the temptation itself, it's not in me to obey in my own strength, but I can obey through or by the indwelling Holy Spirit. We're not in this battle alone. We are given a grave command but it comes with the power to be victorious over being deceived.

So the bridge takes us from the side of not blaming God for temptation that causes us to sin and takes us to the other side where James shows us that we have a generous God.

II. WE HAVE A GENEROUS GOD – vs. 17-18

Verse 17 helps us understand the nature of God that refutes the idea that He is the one who tempts us to sin. The author characterizes God as a giving God. Here's the literal translation "**every gift good and every give perfect from above is continually coming down.**"

Let's consider three points from these verses about our generous God. First, let's consider the work of a generous God.

A. The Work Of A Generous God – v. 17a

Now, notice the contrast between the evil of our heart that entices us to sin and the good gifts of God.

Gift is used twice in the KJV and only once in the NIV indicating the gift is both good and perfect. The KJV "**Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above.**"

What we don't see in the English translation or that is missing in the NIV by only having the word gift

used once is that two different words are used in the Greek for the English word gift and there is a reason for that.

In the first instance, the word gift if from the Greek word *dosis* and means the act of giving. When God gives us a gift it is always done with a right motive because everything He does is good.

Matthew 7:7-11

The act of God in giving is always good, therefore, going back to **verse 13**, God's act of giving is never with evil intent. We learn that in verses like **Romans 8:28** "**All things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.**"

In the Garden of Eden, the act of God was to give Adam and Eve everything they needed to sustain them. They could freely eat from all the trees in the garden except one. Even the command to restrain themselves from eating the fruit of the tree of good and evil was done for their good. Satan came along and told them that God had withheld something good from them, that He wasn't as generous and loving as He claimed to be.

Jesus says His commands aren't burdensome. In fact, we could say they are acts of His goodness so that in obeying them we might find real joy. God's gifts are good.

John 15:9-11 "**As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you. Now remain in My love. If you obey My commands, you will remain in My love, just as I have obeyed My Father's commands and remain in His love. I have told you this so that My joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.**"

The acts of God toward us are always good and when we obey His commandments out of love for Him, the result is joy that is complete or mature.

So the acts of God of what He gives us are always good because He is always good.

Psalm 25:8 "**Good and upright is the Lord.**"
Psalm 34:8 "**O taste and see that the Lord is good.**"

Psalm 86:5 “For You, Lord, are good.”

Psalm 100:5 “For the Lord is good, His mercy endures forever.”

Now that word “good” in our text means intrinsically good, inherently good in quality but also implies good that is profitable or beneficial to others. Because God is holy, His nature is predisposed to doing good, and doing good all the time. One author notes that the word good describes that which is beneficial in addition to being good. It is that which is good in its character, beneficial in its effects and useful in its actions. So when we compare or contrast these verses to what we saw in **verses 13-15**, the good gifts of God stand in stark contrast to the evil of our own hearts desires.

The work of a generous God is to act in giving us what is good and that brings us to the second word used for gift, which in the Greek is *doroma* and means the thing that is given or the gift itself. The first is the act of giving that stems from God being inherently good, and the second is the gift itself that is not just good, James describes it as perfect. It is the best. Because His nature is good, God can only give what is good. The emphasis on this is that it is a free gift that is from a gratuitous nature.

Romans 5:15-17 (v.16)

Greek scholar Vincent notes that this word emphasizes this gift as free, large, and full. James Philip adds that “the best defense against the temptation to stray from God is the possession by experience of His rich gifts that meet all desires.”

James says that the gift God has given is perfect implying that the gift is complete, mature, fully developed, having reached its goal. So the gift that God has given lacks nothing to be complete because we have a perfect God who gives a perfect gift.

People will sometimes say that a gift they have given or received for a special day like Christmas or an anniversary or a birthday was the perfect gift, suggesting that it couldn't be any better.

This past Christmas Robyn might say I gave her the perfect gift. It was an industrial style Bissell floor

scrubber. She was forever on her hands and knees with a scrub brush trying to clean the tile floor. The only better thing for her might have been to hire a maid for the job. She absolutely loves it. You can even ask her. It was the perfect gift for the job.

If God only gives gifts that are good and perfect, it stands to reason that He is not the source of temptation or evil but only and always the source of what is good so that we can overcome temptation. “He stands as a barrier against yielding to temptation and since God is good, we don't need any other person, including and especially Satan to meet our needs...Once we start to doubt God's goodness, as Eve did, we will be attracted to Satan's offers, and the natural desires within will reach for his bait” says Warren Wiersbe.

James goes on to tell us that what God is giving is continuously flowing down to us. The word “is” is in the present tense suggesting a continuous action, that it doesn't stop. James not only tells us about the work of a generous God, that what He gives is always good and that it's continually being given, but the verse shows us the way of a generous God, speaking of His nature.

B. The Way Of A Generous God – v. 17b

“Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.”

“Coming down” is also in the present tense suggesting a continuous action. It's one word in the Greek and means to descend from a higher to a lower place. This good and perfect gift doesn't or can't come from any other source than from above. If it were to come from any other source, then the gift wouldn't be good in the act nor perfect in what is given. The word is used in **Acts 7:34** and is taken from the account in **Exodus 3:8** where God heard the cries and saw the oppression of His people in Egypt and came down to set them free. In the present tense, God is continually coming down to deliver. As believers, we are the beneficiaries of God's amazing grace whereby He repeatedly gives.

We are reminded of that truth in **Psalm 23:1** “**The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want.**” His gift will never run out.

That truth should humble us so that we constantly thank God for His gift on the one hand and on the other hand motivate us to love and obey Him all the more so that we grow in our faith.

Every good gift and perfect gift comes down from above, which is a reference to heaven and specifically from God, whom James declares as the “**Father of lights**”. That name is a reference to God as the Creator who made the lights that govern the day and the night.

Genesis 1:14-18

That name refers to God as the source of all that exists. He is the source of our being and as such, He is the source of all that is good. After each created day, He declared that what He had made was good. He couldn't make it any better and He wouldn't do anything differently. His gifts to us are the same. He can't improve on what He gives because they are both good in the act, meaning that He has only the best intentions for us and what He gives is perfect in the gift itself. So if God gives only what is good, then it stands to reason that what is evil does not come from Him. **So if what God gives is satisfying and complete, why do we look outside His gift to find satisfaction?**

James then concludes the way of a generous God by a comparison between God as the Father of lights, to the very lights he created. Those lights cast shadows. James may have in mind a sundial. As the earth rotates around the sun, it casts a shadow against the dial so that it falls on the face allowing the ability to tell time. The lights God created always cast a shadow. As the day or night advances with the rising and setting of the sun, the shadows change or shift.

Unlike shadows that change throughout the day and night God is immutable or unchanging. That is a principle taught throughout Scripture.

Malachi 3:6 “**I the Lord do not change.**”

Numbers 23:19 “**God is not a man that He should lie, neither the son of man that He should change His mind. Hath He said, and shall He not do it? Hath He spoken and shall He not make it good?**”

The writer of Hebrews who is writing about Christ states that “**Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever.**” **Hebrews 13:8**

The One who is the light and within whom there is no darkness (**I John 1:5**), the One who is holy, cannot turn to what is dark or evil. He can't be the source of darkness or evil. Everything about Him is holy and unchanging: His nature, His perfections, His purposes, His promises and His gifts. As one author noted, God cannot change His mind, His will, or His nature. God would not be God if in some way He could become better than He already is. He would therefore not be unchanging.

We sing of God's unchangeable nature in Martin Luther's great hymn *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*.
**Lord, Sabaoth His Name,
From age to age the same**

Be thankful that God never changes. He won't ever change His promise to you about eternal life. He won't one day decide that you have sinned once too many times and therefore rescind His offer of salvation. All His promises to believers are yes and yes or amen and amen. Because He does not change they will not change and He won't change His mind about any of the gifts He promises. It will never stop coming down from above.

We have seen the work of a generous God who gives to us a good and perfect gift and we have seen that the way a generous God is unchanging. Let's conclude by noting the will of a generous God.

C. The Will Of A Generous God – v. 18

His generosity is seen in the opening words of this verse – “**He chose to give us birth.**” Whereas sin gives birth to death, God gives birth to life. The Greek word used here for chose describes a settled desire originating from one's reason not from one's emotion. It was a deliberate act on God's part who

didn't look on us out of pity and in an emotional state decide not to condemn us. Rather from reason concluded that it was His desire, His will, His choice to intervene in humanity by coming to live among us through the incarnation of Jesus so that in time He would seek and save the lost dying on the cross for our sin, paying the debt Himself, because we are incapable of paying for it ourselves. The Amplified Bible stresses this when it reads **“And it was of His own free will that He gave us birth as sons by His Word of Truth.”**

John 1:12 “For as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become the sons of God, even to those who believe on His name.”

It was His heart, His will that provided the way, the gift of salvation.

II Peter 3:9 “God is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.”

John 6:37 “Whoever comes to Me, I will never drive away (cast out – KJV).”

This life comes from believing the word of truth, hearing the proclamation of the gospel.

Romans 1:16 “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes; to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile.”

Romans 10:17 “Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the Word of Christ.”

I Peter 1:23 “For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.”

The unchangeable God has given us an unchangeable message in the gospel with an unchangeable promise of eternal life. Jesus told Nicodemus that he **“must be born again.”** That is the message He gives to everyone. To these early believers they became a kind of firstfruit that would produce a great harvest of others who like them would receive this gift of salvation. They are a prelude to others who will follow in being added to the family of God through the new birth. This verse

is a reference to the regenerating work of God in the heart of the person who trusts Christ as Savior so that immediately the work of the Holy Spirit in transforming the person from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light takes place and instantaneously we are a new creation. He washes away and forgives our sin and gives us a new nature. **John 17:17** tells us that His Word is truth and that truth sanctifies or makes us holy.

God gives good gifts. The way God gives is good. God gives constantly. God does not change. **If God constantly showers His children with what is the most satisfying and valuable gifts He could possibly give us, why would we want to look elsewhere?**

We began by talking about bridges. We can deceive ourselves thinking that all we need to do is work hard at being good, giving or going to church. But one day we can come to the realization that the bridge we thought would get us to heaven doesn't get us there and we stand with a great chasm from where we are to where we want to be.

We can be disheartened thinking that all hope is lost and we won't ever make it on our own until we realize that God provided a bridge for us to be able to cross over into heaven. That bridge is the cross on which Christ died for our sin to give us eternal life so that all who believe on Him will not perish but have eternal life. God chooses to give you life if you will but receive His gift. You can't reach heaven by any other bridge. He's made the way possible. It's up to you to decide whether you want to take the bridge He has provided to go from death to life. It is a bridge like no other. It has no equal.

We have a grave command but a generous God. Never forget that God gives good and perfect gifts. The greatest gift is eternal life through His Son.