

# The Goodness of God p1

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**Bible Text:** James 1:17-21

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James 1. As I was thinking about this text and this message, I was thrilled to meditate on the goodness of God and it was very helpful, very, very helpful and I hope that you will conclude as I concluded that we miss some things about the goodness of God we don't need to be missing. We need to have these things ruminating up fresh on our hearts and minds much more frequently than we do. Let me just get into it and then we'll look at it as we go through the text. The goodness of God, James 1:17-21. James, the pastor of a local church, very, very practical in his instruction says starting in verse 17,

“17 Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow. 18 In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures. 19 This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; 20 for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. 21 Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.”

I love what James does here and you'll find this common throughout the rest of the epistles and that is he gives us this rich discourse of theology that everything good comes from God and God is the one who brought us forth by the word of truth and then wham, he goes right into a very everyday, down-to-earth, practical application. He's like, “Alright, filthy talk and these kinds of things,” he gets right into practical stuff and that's as it should be. Let me caution you again. Some of you love to read and you read good stuff and you read rich theology books and things of that nature, that's all good but remember it's to the end of us being different and particularly, it's all to the end of us being more effective in our homes and in our local churches for the glory of God. Theology is always practical. It is to be lived out.

But first of all, anchoring in verse 17, let's notice God's absolute goodness. You say, “Pastor, we know God is good.” Yes, but you need to think on it. God's absolute goodness. Verse 17, “Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights.” Now, there's a context here that's very important: in verses 13-16, well, let's just read that together. He talks about how evil

comes from us, not from God. He said, "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone." That's 13, now 14, "But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed," here's the phrase, "by his own lust." God in no way, shape or fashion puts people in situations whereby they fall into wickedness and vileness and corruption and sin and disobedience, it's their own heart lust that causes that. Then verse 15, "Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren." He gives you the contrasting backdrop of man is the source of evil but God is good, every good thing comes from him. Every perfect thing comes down from heaven from him.

You see, man left to himself inevitably ends up ruining everything. He ends up in utter darkness but in contrast, God is called the Lord of lights. He's constant. He never changes. He will never dim to the slightest shade of gray. By the way, that's why the message of the Christian church and the message of the gospel can never change because he doesn't so the message cannot. So, we are right. We want to make sure our spirits are right and we want to make sure our hearts are humble but we are right constantly sounding the alarm on so much so-called evangelical and so much so-called conservative evangelical preaching today that so soft-pedals and dumbs-down if not completely leaves out great and rich doctrine that the Scriptures make very clear. We can't change the message because the Father doesn't change, the truth hasn't changed.

I've heard it before. I remember even when I was a boy there was a pastor who came to the Methodist Church where my family attended and unfortunately, it was a Methodist Church that went liberal many, many years ago. Now, there are some good godly people there and I know that for sure because there was a little lady that taught me the word of God in Vacation Bible School when I was a little boy and I never got over it. Isn't that neat? I didn't really even go to church but I went to a Vacation Bible School and a woman taught me Psalm 100 and it resonated in my soul until I was saved at age 19 so moms and dads, folks who teach nursery, the person who teaches Vacation Bible School, you'll never know and every soul that's been touched by my ministry, that lady has a part of it. But the church as a whole had gone liberal and I remember they got a preacher in one time and he was an older Methodist. I love old Methodist preachers because they usually have some fire and he was preaching the word and I remember one of the leading men of the church – if I said it some Lawrenceburg folks would know exactly who I'm talking about – he said, "Well, he needs to learn to change with the times." I'm sorry, that's not true. No, we need to line up with the Lord of the ages and not change with the times because he just never changes.

Well, and that's really one of the very, very, very first things we want to talk about today is that God never changes. He's good. He's perfect. And he changes not. He never, ever changes. He just uses that phrase here in verse 17, there is "no variation of shifting shadow." The God that your great-great-great-great grandparents loved and treasured and worshiped and strived to obey in their lives is the exact same God that we are to love and treasure and strive to worship and obey today. Now, our country has changed. I mean, I guess we shouldn't be shocked but I cannot get over how prominent government officials

now proudly, boisterously and boldly promote wickedness. For many years, we'd have people who take office in this country, sit on the Supreme Court, seat at the Senate, maybe even President of the United States and it's like they would kind of give their okay to something but they kind of did it out of the side of their mouth. They sort of did it in silent, in private, but we've turned a corner. We have radically crossed the line of ever being ashamed of anything wicked anymore. The most vile and vulgar and evil wickednesses are now celebrated and encouraged and congratulated by our country's leaders. I'm telling you: that is where Sodom was. You say, "Well Pastor, all sin has been in every age and all men sin." Yes, we certainly do sin but, friends, there are lines you don't cross and when you begin to shamelessly exalt and promote what God calls wickedness, you'd better bet the judgment of God is coming. Not many of us are saying that today but it's coming. As a matter of fact, it's already upon us but we just don't recognize it and it's turning against us.

But God doesn't change. He has what the theologians call immutability. He does not mutate. He never changes. He is infinitely perfect. Isn't that what he says in the verse here? "Every perfect gift is from above." It's a perfect gift because it comes from the perfect One and if he could ever change or vary, then he wouldn't be perfect because needing to change implies that you weren't completely adequate before. But God doesn't change because he's always been perfectly adequate. Has it ever occurred to you that nothing has ever occurred to God? Have you ever thought about that? God has never had a moment when he said, "You know, I've had better days than this." That's never happened to God. God has never had a finer moment. Amen? He's always been perfect, always excellent, always the height in the perfections of holiness. He can't be more faithful, he's faithful. He can't be more loving, he's perfectly loving. He can't be more just, he's absolutely just. He can't be more holy. Malachi 3:6, "I am the Lord and I change not." Psalm 102:27, "But thou art the same and thy years shall have no end." God never changes.

Well, secondly, therefore, God is always good. God is always good. The text simply says, "Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from him, it's from above." Now I want to talk about three areas and we can just touch on this but before I touch on this, I began to think about it and I thought, "You know, if we could think deeply enough, we could for infinity think of things that point out the goodness of God." If we had the capacity to know God as he can be known and to think deeply enough, we would never have enough time to ruminate on and praise him for all the goodness he has. Think of the goodness that he imparts to his creatures. I was just hunting this week and there was a songbird that was just really letting it go. I mean, this bird was really singing. I thought, "Well, it's not spring. What's going on here?" But that bird seemed immensely happy. I just don't think birds just sing, I think the Creator has put a joy in their hearts. What is that? That's the goodness of God. Now, we don't do good with cats around my house, they just seem to die quickly if we get a cat but it is kind of neat to see a little cat purr. Are any of you cat people? They just purr and they just seem so happy. Why do you think cats purr and get happy? It shows the goodness of God. God has no obligation to make his creatures have happiness and find pleasures but they do.

I've got an old labrador retriever at my house. Her name is Lucy. I call her my garbage can dog. I went to the garbage can one morning and somebody had dropped her and she was right there by the garbage can and I fooled with her a little bit and I thought, "This dog's got good sense. I think I'll just keep her," and I've had her ever since and that dog loves me more than Pam loves me, that dog loves me more than my three girls. I mean, that dog loves me and I love her, I mean, I'm not a big gushy dog person. I love her but I mean, she just loves me and if I ever come up to her, she can't move real good anymore, she broke her hip some time ago and it's slowed her down but if I get both of my hands and just rub her face, she would just literally go, "Urrrr." She just moans with pleasure. Why would an animal sense and express such pleasure? Folks, it's the goodness of God. Now think about how far you could go? This isn't just a preacher talking, this is the truth. God is so good. He gives his creatures satisfaction and he gives them pleasures all within the sphere of their very beings. Their eyes wait on God and he gives them their provision in due season. I don't think there's any animal out in the woods today that's worrying about next spring or next fall but they just trust in the Lord because he's good and they know it.

Not only his goodness to his creatures, think about his goodness to the angels. You know, his love is in constant exercise toward them. He preserves them; he cares for them; he extends multitudes of blessings to the angels that makes their existence a perpetual joy. We get glimpses of this particularly in Isaiah and in Revelation. In Isaiah, when Isaiah saw the vision of the Lord sitting on his throne, he said there are seraphim flying back and forth around the presence of that throne and the expression of the text is they thunder forth with great enthusiasm, the great pleasures they have of crying out, "Holy, Holy, Holy." They are thrilled and filled with pleasure at serving around the presence of God. Why does God do that? Because God is good. He's very, very good.

He's also shown his great, great goodness to man. We can only talk about a few things there but his goodness to man far, far exceeds his goodness to his creatures or his goodness to his angels. Notice first of all, the constitution of our bodies. He gave us five senses, didn't he? All these five sense: the hearing, the seeing, the smelling, the tasting, the touching, all of these senses are great inlets of great, great pleasures and enjoyment. Think about the pleasures we get with food. Think about that. God was under no obligation to give you taste buds but he did it. And think of all the different tastes, the varieties, the complexities, all the marvelous things we eat and enjoy from a grilled hamburger to white beans with ham hocks, to cornbread. You know my background, don't you? Whatever. Just breakfast foods and lunch foods and dinner or supper foods and snacks in between and all the varieties and they all give wonderful pleasure. What a marvelous thing this is.

Think about the sense of seeing. Pam and I were just discussing recently when we were in Africa ministering with Conrad and Betty there and what a blessing it was and we took about three days at the end before we flew home and stayed in a little resort there in the southern region of Africa and we just were marveling over the sunsets in Africa. Africa is an amazing beautiful place and the sunsets are just overwhelming. Well, that's just one of hundreds if not thousands of vistas you could have around the world that you take in

through the sense of seeing that brings great pleasure. I mean, we may drive home and it would be a little bit late this time of the year but very often I will leave the church in the evenings on Sunday or even leave in the evenings after the work day and see the sun setting and it just brings joy. All the great joys God brings through the sense of seeing.

Smelling. The beauty of a flower. The beauty and the blessings and the enjoyment of music that we've enjoyed even on this very night. Ecclesiastes 11:7 says, "The light is pleasant and it is good for the eyes to see the sun." He's talking about the pleasures that it brings. Dr. Pendleton say in his "Systematic Theology," he says, "God might have made the sense only the medium of pain and disgust. He might have rendered every object of sight as repulsive and loathsome as a serpent. He might have rendered every object of taste as bitter as wormwood, every object of smell as offensive as a putrefying carcass and every object of touch as painful as the piercing of a thorn and every item of sound as doleful as the well of a sorrow but God's goodness is seen in the formation of our bodies with the view to physical enjoyment." Now, think about that: God in his infinite wisdom said, "I want to design man as such that he will have practically unlimited inlets for pleasures and joy.

Think about this for a moment: everything about your seeing, everything about your hearing, everything about your smelling, everything about your touching, everything about your tasting is cursed by the fall of sin. Think about that: everything is vastly diminished and everything that you receive pleasure from in this world is fallen and cursed by sin. Now listen to me for a moment: what is it going to be like when the curse is lifted and you have perfect eyes and perfect ears and perfect noses and perfect touch and perfect hands and a perfect environment? Can you fathom the infinite pleasures? Why would God do that? Because he's good. He's good. He's just deeply, deeply good.

Our minds are wonders beyond compare as far as anything we know in the created realm. The power of the mind is made in such a way that we can comprehend and receive great happiness and great enjoyment. We learn and we gain knowledge and it makes us glad. The possession of intellect raises us above the beasts and gives us realms of pleasure and enjoyment the beasts can never know. Why? Because of the goodness of God.

But none of this can come close and, again, as I said, if we could think deeply enough, you would never stop marveling over the goodnesses of God but none of this can even come close to compare to the redemptive goodness of God. I've been talking about in a broad way the absolute goodness of God. Let's talk now about the redemptive goodness of God and that's exactly where James goes. He's writing to his church and he's bringing them into this exhortation of these beautiful truths. He says, "In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth." The Bible says that "God has demonstrated his own love toward us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." I was reading A. W. Pink just earlier and A. W. Pink said, "We come into this world in bondage to hell and unfit for heaven." Dr. Pink was deploying this, this was like 1907 when he wrote this and well, that might be a little bit too early. I can't give you the exact date. Many, many years ago when Dr. Pink was doing his writing and he's been dead for a long, long time but he was saying that preachers aren't preaching the great truths of man's sinfulness and

God's exquisite, infinite holiness and men aren't seeing their need of a Savior like they ought to and that's why he used that phrase. Men have to grasp and understand they are in bondage to hell and unfit for heaven and God completely fixes that problem through his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. 1 John 4:10 says, "And this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

When I was a new believer, I was 19 years of age, a college freshman and, my goodness, I was so ignorant. I wasn't raised in church to speak of and there was so much to learn and I remember having that common thought that you find among baby Christians and among lost people and that is, "Why would God let so many bad things happen to good people?" And then you get in the word and God begins to correct your thinking. He starts getting you from upside down thinking to rightside up thinking and now for many years, my thinking has been, "How could God do so many wonderful good things for so many bad, corrupt and evil people?" That's the only normal or right way to think about all of this.

First of all, under God's redemptive goodness, notice that redemption was planned in the heart of God. Our salvation, our redemption was planned in the heart of God. Here we come again and honestly when I thought about this text, I was not talking about any of the rich and glorious truths of the sovereignty of God in salvation but here it is again. You just can't get away from it. Everywhere you go, God brings forth the great truth of the sovereignty of God in salvation. Then I thought another thought, "Why do you want to get away from it?" It's such a wonderful and glorious truth. Notice in verse 18, "In the exercise of His will He brought us forth." Wow. He puts all the emphasis on God. It was God's choice to offer salvation. It's God's choice to offer a man salvation. He wasn't required. Some men preach today as if God is in heaven and there's sort of a duality between God and man and God is under some obligation to man. God has no obligation to man at all. He's obligated only to his own will and for his own glory. Period. We are not consumed because in his infinite wisdom he chose to glorify himself by saving us. Period. It was God's choice to offer salvation. It was God's choice as to the method to provide our salvation. It was God in the securing of our individual salvation. All was the initiative and the plan of God. God acted deliberately and of his own will to save us. That's what he means here in verse 18, "In the exercise of His will ."

Now, secondly, not only was redemption planned in the heart of God, redemption is the work of God. It's the work of God. He goes on in verse 18, next phrase in the exercise of his will, "He brought us forth by the word of truth." That phrase "He brought us forth" is the idea of birthing. It's something that was unborn and then comes forth and when you ladies have a child, you know when he or she comes forth and breaks out into this world and that's the picture we have here. It's the birthing of light coming out of darkness. It's the picture of regeneration. We stood in the darkness of sin and guilt and condemnation and we were separated from God and he brought us forth out of all of that. It's the idea that Jesus speaks of in John 3 when Nicodemus is asking him about how he can have eternal life and Jesus said, "Well, you must be born-again." Another way to say that is: you must be born from above. "Nicodemus, you've been born of your natural parents down below here on the earth. You also need a second birth, a birthing from above." And

one person said, "It's like being formed again." You were formed one time by your physical parents in a physical womb with a physical body, now you need to be formed again by the Spirit of God in the spirit of your hearts and that's what this phrase means, God brought us forth.

It's that new birth. It means to change radically and to change radically for the better and there's a mystery here. We don't understand this and one of the great, great, great challenges of every age of the church and every age of preachers is not to reduce the new birth down to mechanics. One of the great temptations is to take something that God made a mystery so that we would have to pray and we would have to look and by faith we would have to depend on God to do the work in men's hearts and that's hard for us. We don't like to be spiritual. We don't like to have trust by faith. We don't like to have to depend on prayer for God to work in men's hearts so we try to use the Bible to come up with a method, with a system, with a work, with some steps. The end result is, we have modern Christendom. Millions and millions and millions and millions and millions and millions and millions and I could go on and on, who claim to know Christ and their lives give no fruit or evidence whatsoever.

But we've got to get back to this glorious goodness of God that he planned salvation and he works salvation. He brought us forth by the word of truth. Now, you could translate that by the message "marked by truth." There is a message that has the mark of truth upon it and that's the message of the gospel, that's the message of man is a sinner, man's under the wrath of God and Jesus became the vicarious sacrifice and took our position of judgment, took the wrath for us in our place on the cross and that if we will look to him in faith, we can be saved. That message is God's means of bringing us forth in the new birth or into salvation.

A couple of cross-references here: Colossians 1:5 says, "Because the hope laid up for you in heaven of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel." Ephesians 1:13, "In him you also after listening to the message of the truth, the gospel of your salvation, having also believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise." So, here we have this word of truth being emphasized as God's method for bringing us forth, birthing us into the kingdom of God, regenerating our very hearts. So it's the words of the gospel message that are applied to the heart by the Holy Spirit of God enabling us to believe, thus bringing us forth out of darkness into light.

We're talking about the redemptive goodness of God. We've already talked about that the redemption was planned in the heart of God. We talked about redemption being the work of God. Now, thirdly, under the goodness of God in redemption: redemption is for his glory. Notice how he words it here in 18, it's for him. Now, you get an incredibly wonderful benefit out of this but it's primarily for him. Verse 18, "In the exercise of His will," that's the plan, "He brought us forth," that's the work, "by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures." You see, God has a first creation but he has a second creation. Once you're born-again, you transfer out of the first creation that's under the curse and judgment into the new creation and when Jesus returns, great mysteries here also, he's going to create a new heaven and a new earth where

righteousness dwells, sin will be banished and that will be the second creation and we're already a part of it, we're just waiting to get to our home. Amen?

So he says here: all of those who are saved are the firstfruits of that new creation. By the way, the second creation is far, far better than the first one. Listen to me: Adam and Eve had a wonderful existence in the Garden before they sinned but it's not to be compared with the Garden we're going to have when we get to heaven. Do you know why? Because the new heaven is based on the standard of the righteousness of Jesus Christ. The old Eden, the old Paradise, was based on the standard of righteousness of Adam and Eve, which wasn't bad but it's not near as great and glorious as Jesus' righteousness. When you get to heaven, remember, you'll not have the righteousness that Adam and Eve lost in the Garden, when you get to heaven, you have the righteousness of Jesus, the Son of God.

The second creation is greater than the first and he says we are the firstfruits. That has the idea of the finest and the best of that new creation. In other words, God is picturing himself, God and his Son are picturing themselves as farmers, as agriculturalists. If you're going to have a fair and they have a judging down at the fair, you bring in your best crops or your cattle or your pigs or whatever they are that you want to show off and they judge and the finest and best get the reward. God says, "In my new creation, the finest and best trophies I have there are the saints of God that through the exercise of my will I brought forth out of darkness through the word of truth, the gospel."

So what a powerful picture of how we are and our redemption and God's goodness is to the end of him receiving great, great, great glory. Now, a Jewish audience would have really understood this because the Jewish law, the Old Testament law, the Levitical law, was very thorough and very clear about their tithes and offerings. When they went out and brought in their produce, they waited all year long, they planted their seed, they worked those fields, they actually depended upon the early and latter rains in order to have a good crop and when that crop finally came in, the first and the best of the first, they could not keep. The first and the best of the first was required by Levitical law to be taken to the temple for the priests, the Levitical priesthood and that's what they lived on. God gave the ministers of the old covenant the first and the best of whatever came into the people's lives. So, God uses that symbol, that figure and says, "In my new creation, the new eternal state I'm going to create where righteousness dwells and no sin can enter, my saved ones will be the first and the best of all that new creation. It's all to show forth my great glory and my great accomplishments."

This is God's love and this is God's devotion to us and this is God's goodness. How very good he is. Pray that we would have a little deeper heart of understanding the great goodness of God. In his love and devotion, he planned our redemption. In his love and his devotion to us, he worked out our redemption. In his plan and devotion to us, he's made us the firstfruits of his eternal kingdom where we will dwell with him forever and ever and ever. The absolute goodness of God and the redemptive goodness of God.

Let's stand together in prayer.