

James 1:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

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 (pasa dosis, πᾶσα δόσις) and perfect gift (dōrēma, δῶρημα) descends from the Father of lights, with whom there is "no variableness" (parallagē, παραλλαγή) nor "shadow of turning" (tropēs aposkiasma, τροπῆς ἀποσκίασμα). James draws from astronomy: unlike moving shadows cast by shifting heavenly bodies, God's character does not change.

This robust doctrine of divine immutability comforts believers. Grace flows steadily because God's nature is unwavering. Reformed theology treasures this: the God who gave His Son will not withhold wisdom or mercy. The mention of "good gift" links to the wisdom promised earlier and prepares for the gift of new birth in verse 18.

Historical Context

Surrounded by pagan myths of capricious deities, diaspora Christians needed assurance that the God of Abraham, now revealed fully in Christ, is consistently generous. James, writing from Jerusalem, reinforces Jewish monotheistic conviction while highlighting Christological fulfillment. Paul's doxologies (Romans 11:33-36) resonate with the same theme.

The astronomical metaphor would resonate with communities who used lunar cycles for festivals; James repurposes familiar imagery to declare God's unchanging fidelity.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How does God's immutability comfort you amid change?
2. What daily gifts can you intentionally trace back to the Father of lights?
3. How might gratitude reshape your stewardship this week?

Interlinear Text

πᾶν	δόσις	ἀγαθὴ	καὶ	πᾶν	δώρημα	τέλειον	ἄνωθέν
Every	gift	good	and	Every	gift	perfect	from above
G3956	G1394	G18	G2532	G3956	G1434	G5046	G509
ἐστίν	καταβαῖνον	ἀπὸ	τοῦ	πατρὸς	τῶν	φώτων	παρ'
is	and cometh down	from	G3588	the Father	G3588	of lights	with
G2076	G2597	G575		G3962		G5457	G3844
ὃν	οὐκ	ἐν	παραλλαγῇ	ἢ	τροπῆς	ἀποσκίασμα	
whom	no	is	variableness	neither	of turning	shadow	
G3739	G3756	G1762	G3883	G2228	G5157	G644	

Additional Cross-References

John 3:27 (Parallel theme): John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven.

Matthew 7:11 (Good): If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?

Hebrews 13:8 (Parallel theme): Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.

John 8:12 (Light): Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

Numbers 23:19 (Good): God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?

1 John 1:5 (Light): This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

James 3:17 (Good): But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

Proverbs 2:6 (Parallel theme): For the LORD giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding.

Psalms 84:11 (Good): For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.

Malachi 3:6 (Parallel theme): For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.