

OUR CHANGELESS GOD IN OUR CHANGING WORLD JAMES 1:17

James 1:17 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. KJV

James 1:17 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. NKJV

James 1:17 Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation, or shifting shadow. NASB

James 1:17 Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. NIV

This verse is all about change and changelessness.

God is changeless, all else changes. "Nothing defines our age more than the furious and relentless increase in the rate of change," summarizes historian Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.

For thousands of years of recorded history change came in a slow, controlled and understandable rate, now we are brutally jerked forward at warp speed whether we like it or not. This morning God says seek out the old paths where you find rest for your soul ...Jer 6:16

I thought of that recently while reading the following job description given to floor nurses by a hospital in 1887. You who are nurses and physicians will smile in disbelief.

NURSES' DUTIES IN 1887

In addition to caring for your fifty patients, each nurse will follow these regulations:

1. Daily sweep and mop the floors of your ward, dust the patient's furniture and windowsills.
2. Maintain an even temperature in your ward by bringing in a scuttle of coal for the day's business.

3. Light is important to observe the patient's condition. Therefore, each day fill kerosene lamps, clean chimneys, and trim wicks. Wash the windows once a week.
4. The nurse's notes are important in aiding the physician's work. Make your pens carefully; you may whittle nibs to your individual taste.
5. Each nurse on day duty will report every day at 7 AM and leave at 8 PM., except on the Sabbath, on which day you will be off from 12 noon to 2 PM.
6. Graduate nurses in good standing with the director of nurses will be given an evening off each week for courting purposes or two evenings a week if you go regularly to church.
7. Each nurse should lay aside from each payday a goodly sum of her earnings for her benefits during her declining years so that she will not become a burden. For example, if you earn \$30 a month, you should set aside \$15.
8. Any nurse who smokes, uses liquor in any form, gets her hair done at a beauty shop, or frequents dance halls will give the director of nurses good reason to suspect her worth, intentions, and integrity.
9. The nurse who performs her labors and serves her patients and doctors faithfully and without fault for a period of five years will be given an increase by the hospital administration of five cents a day, providing there are no hospital debts that are outstanding.

As you chuckle about that, look back at the Word in James 1:17. When James introduces us to our changeless, unchanging, never varying Father, he calls Him the Father of Lights. This is quite an introduction.

Observe with me all the truth in this short verse:

- God gives gifts.
- God is above us.
- God gives only good things to us. (Satan gives loans with high interest rates)
- God gives perfect gifts (Satan gives only tricks)
- God gives constantly. (All the tenses of the verbs in this verse are present indicatives meaning ongoing action.)
- God is the Father of Lights (stars, cosmic luminaries, etc.)
- God does not change, vary, quit, get cut off, run out, burn out, etc!

Have you thought about God lately?

I mean, about how big and powerful He is?

He is so much bigger than anything we are facing today is.

He is infinitely more able to care for any difficulty than we are.

Have you been still and experienced God? Psalm 46:10 Be still, and know that I am God;

I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth! NKJV

Turn back with me to Psalm 147:4-18 He counts the number of the stars; He calls them all by name. 5 Great [is] our Lord, and mighty in power; His understanding [is] infinite. **GOD COUNTS AND CALLS THEM ALL!**

Hebrews 1:10 And: "You, LORD, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, And the heavens are the work of Your hands. (NKJV)

Hebrews 11:3 By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible. (NKJV)
GOD SPOKE AND SNAPPED IT ALL UP OUT OF NOTHING.

Now Psalm 8:1-3 O Lord, our Lord, How excellent is Your name in all the earth, Who have set Your glory above the heavens! 3 When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, The moon and the stars, which You have ordained, 4 What is man that You are mindful of him, And the son of man that You visit him? NKJV

1. HAVE YOU EVER CONSIDERED HOW MUCH MATTER GOD MADE FROM NOTHING IN THIS UNIVERSE IS THAT WAS JUST A SNAP FOR GOD TO WHIP UP? Scientific American 2/97 "Challenge of large numbers" p. 74- 78 "The size of atoms"
 - The 19th century Italian chemist Ame-deo Avo-gardo represents the number of atoms in 12 grams of pure carbon.
 - This amount is called a mole (6.02x10 to the 23rd power) and can be understood in the following way, if 1 gram (one piece of kid's cereal like Captain Crunch) of carbon was expanded to the size of the earth, a single carbon atom would be the size of a bowling ball.
 - Another measure of a mole is to say that all the calculations of all computers from the 1st to the present, in all the world, added together would possibly equal the number of atoms in a mole (small computers can do millions per second and main frames far more).
 - The total number of protons on the universe is 10 to the 80th.
 - The evolutionary age of the universe is 10 to the 10th.
2. HAVE YOU EVER CONSIDERED HOW POWERFUL THIS UNIVERSE IS THAT WAS JUST A SNAP FOR GOD TO WHIP UP? "Galactic Gushers" (p.26) are shining with the energy of a trillion suns, quasars are the brightest as well as the most distant known objects in the universe.
 - Now found to exist in "undisturbed" that is non-colliding galaxies and all (loud radio wave and quiet) being similar, pose a colossal problem.
 - Why do they have fundamentally similar qualities?
 - They are about the size of our solar system and seem at present to be the product of gasses being pulled into collapsed star black holes heated by the nearly speed of light slurping flow into the abyss.
3. HAVE YOU EVER CONSIDERED HOW VAST THIS UNIVERSE IS THAT WAS JUST A SNAP FOR GOD TO WHIP UP? "Ghostliest Galaxies" p. 56
 - It was not until the 1980's that man's scientific observation skills were developed enough to detect the most numerous of all the known galaxies out there in the universe.
 - Up to 1980 there were calculated to be about a billion of the 3 known types (elliptical, spiral and irregular) of galaxies.
 - Spirals are including our own Milky Way having a pronounced bulge in their center.
 - In other words half the population of the universe is made up of low-surface-brightness-galaxies.

- They are up to 20 times larger (galaxies measured in kilo-parsecs; a parsec is 3.26 light years; our Milky Way is 3 kilo-parsecs; the largest galaxy now Malin 1 is 20 times larger!) and less densely filled with stars, though in the same three patterns.
- Current explanation? Evolving slower and not mature yet!

So God is big and strong enough to make all that and yet personal enough to know every atom, cell and thought in you this morning. What does James 1:17 teach?

Observe with me all the truth in this short verse:

➤ God gives gifts. Are we asking for them? Looking for them? Thanking Him for them? God is above us. He is awesome and Eternal. Listen to what a professor at Moody Bible Institute records as happening to him in the 1940's. "One of the deaf and dumb pupils in the institution of Paris, being desired to express his idea of the eternity of the Lord, replied:

'It is duration, without beginning or end; existence, without bounds or dimension; present, without past or future. His eternity is youth, without infancy or old age; life, without birth or death; today, without yesterday or tomorrow.' "¹

- God gives only good things to us. (Satan gives loans with high interest rates) Do you trust Him?
- God gives perfect gifts (Satan gives only tricks) Do you believe Him?
- God gives constantly. (All the tenses of the verbs in this verse are present indicatives meaning ongoing action.) Do you know Him?
- God is the Father of Lights (stars, cosmic luminaries, etc.) Do you worship Him?
- God does not change, vary, quit, get cut off, run out, burn out, etc! Do you rest in Him?

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Now turn with me to Psalm 102

What does it mean that God is IMMUTABLE or changeless? Even more, how does that truth impact my life? Twenty years ago the renowned preacher J.I. Packer asked a profound question to his audience, "How can the record of God's words and deeds in Bible times, the record of His dealings with Abraham and Moses and David and the rest, help us, who have to live in the space age?" ² May we add to that those who live in the fax, gigabit, fiber optic world of cellular phones, cable TV and information that doubles every five years. Presently, we accumulate more facts every year than were recorded in all of time up to 1970!

¹ Evans, **DOCTRINE OF GOD**, p. 37

² *Knowing God*, Downers Grove:IVP, 1973, 67-72.

How can this 4,000 year old book from the Middle East have anything to do with the laser guided, stealth technology and biomedical ethics of the nearly twenty-first century? The answer lies in this attribute of God: IMMUTABILITY

Packer continues, "Thus it appears that the truth on which we must dwell to dispel this feeling that there is an unbridgeable gulf between the position of men in the Bible times and our own, is the truth of God's immutability."³

Look at Psalm 102:25-27 with me:

Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed: But thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end. (KJV)

What are seven characteristics of the unchanging nature of God? Lets note these fixed reference points that build security and stability:

1. God's WORD does not change.

- Numbers 23:19 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? (KJV)
- Psalm 119:89 For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven. (KJV)
- Psalm 119:152 Concerning thy testimonies, I have known of old that thou hast founded them for ever. (KJV)
- Isaiah 40:8 The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever." (NIV)

During⁴ my ministry in Vietnam in 1971, one of my interpreters who traveled with me was Hien Pham, an energetic, devoted young Christian who had worked very closely as a translator with the American military forces, purely as a civilian, with no official or military responsibilities. He just knew English so well that he was able to be of immense help to them in their linguistic struggles.

By virtue of that same strength he also worked with the missionaries. He and I traveled the length of the country and became very close friends before I bade him good-bye when I left Vietnam to return home. We were both very young, and neither of us knew if our paths would cross again. Within four years Vietnam fell, and Hien's fate was unknown, until seventeen years later, in 1988:

Shortly after Vietnam fell to the Communists, Hien was arrested. Accused of aiding and abetting the Americans he was in and out of prison for several years. During one long jail term, the sole purpose of his jailers was to indoctrinate him against the West-and especially against democratic ideals and the Christian faith. He was cut off from reading anything in English and restricted to communist propaganda in French or Vietnamese. This daily overdose of the writings of Marx and Engels began to take its toll on him. One

³ **Ibid., p.68.**

⁴ **Ravi Zacharias, Deliver us from evil, p. 191ff.**

of the books he was given to read pictured the communist man as a bird in the ironclad cage of capitalism, throwing itself against the bars of "capitalist oppression" and bloodying itself in the process. Yet still it continued to struggle in its quest for freedom.

Hien began to buckle under the onslaught. *Maybe*, he thought, I *have* been lied to. Maybe God does *not* exist. Maybe my whole life *has* been governed by lies. Maybe the West *has* deceived me. The more he thought, the more he moved toward a decision. Finally, he made up his mind. He determined that when he awakened the next day, he would not pray anymore or ever think of his Christian faith again.

The next morning, he was assigned to clean the latrines of the prison. It was the most dreaded chore, shunned by everyone, and so with much distress he began the awful task. As he cleaned out a tin can filled to overflowing with toilet paper, his eye caught what he thought was English printed on one piece of paper. He hurriedly washed it off and slipped it into his hip pocket, planning to read it at night. Not having seen anything in English for such a long time, he anxiously waited for a free moment. Under his mosquito net that night after his roommates had fallen asleep, he pulled out a small flashlight and shining it on the damp piece of paper he read at the top corner, "Romans, Chapter 8." Literally trembling with shock, he began to read:

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose....

What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? ...

Who shall Separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 8: 28, 31, 32, 35, 37-39)

Hien wept. He knew his Bible, and he had not seen one for so long. Not only that, he knew there was not a more relevant passage of conviction and strength for one on the verge of surrendering to the threat of evil. He cried out to God, asking for forgiveness, for this was to have been the first day in years that he had determined not to pray. Evidently the Lord had other plans.

The next day, Hien asked the camp commander if he could clean the latrine again. He continued with this chore on a regular basis, because he had discovered that some official in the camp was using a Bible as toilet paper. Each day Hien picked up a portion of Scripture, cleaned it off, and added it to his nightly devotional reading. In this way he retrieved a significant portion of the Bible.

The day came when, through an equally providential set of circumstances, Hien was released. He promptly began to make plans to escape from the country. After several unsuccessful attempts he began again to build a boat in secret. About fifty-three other

people planned to escape with him, and Hien was taking the lead. All was going according to plan until a short while before the date of their departure when four Vietcong knocked on Hien's door. When he opened it, they accosted him and said they had heard he was trying to escape. "Is it true?" they demanded. Hien immediately denied it and went on to distract them with some concocted story to explain his activities. Apparently convinced, they reluctantly left.

Hien was relieved but very disappointed with himself "Here I go again, Lord, trying to manipulate my own destiny, too unteachable in my spirit to really believe that You can lead me past any obstacle." He made a promise to God, fervently hoping that the Lord would not take him up on it. He prayed that if the Vietcong were to come back again, he would tell them the truth. Resting in the comfort of that impossibility, he was thoroughly shaken when only a few hours before they were to set sail the four men stood at his door once more. "We have our sources, and we know you are trying to escape. Is it true?" Hien resignedly gave his answer, "Yes, I am, with fifty-three others. Are you going to imprison me again?" There was a pronounced pause. And then they leaned forward and whispered, "No. We want to escape with you!"

In an utterly incredible escape plan, all fifty-eight of them found themselves on the high seas, suddenly engulfed by a violent storm. Hien fell with his face in his hands, crying out to God, "Did You bring us here to die?"

As he concluded his story, he said, "Brother Ravi, if it were not for the sailing ability of those four Vietcong, we would not have made it. They arrived safely in Thailand, and years later Hien arrived on American soil where today he is a businessman-forever grateful for America and praying that she would open her heart as a nation to Christ.

The famed poet William Cowper wrote:

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.

His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour:
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower.

Blind unbelief is sure to err,
And scan His works in vain:
God is His own interpreter,
And He will make it plain.

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