
Every Good Gift is the Perfect Gift

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*
by Dean Sam Candler**

It doesn't matter what gift catalog we receive in the mail or in our email inbox. It doesn't matter what classic boutique we are fond of visiting. Wherever we turn, we hear the same pitch: "The Perfect Gift!" Here is the perfect gift store! Here is the perfect gift!

We wander through shops that are just fine, with all sorts of delightful treasures, curiosities. Yet, we can't seem to find the perfect gift for ... that loved one, that child, that parent, that friend. What is the perfect gift?

The stern and quirky little Epistle of James, appearing near the end of the New Testament, might offer some advice. This verse appears in the first chapter: "Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change" (James 1:17).

Essentially, the verse is saying that "Every good gift, every perfect give, is from above." Can that verse help us? What are the perfect gifts of life?

Let's start by reminding ourselves that the biblical sense of the word "perfect" is not what we tend to think. Awkwardly, that word "perfect" shows up on our list of moral goods and commandments. But, in the New Testament, the word "perfect" rarely means having obeyed every commandment, or having no blemishes, or even having no error. Instead, the word "perfect" is usually a translation of the word that means "goal" or "finish." The perfect is what we are and what we have, when we have reached our goal or met our conclusion. Thus, whenever we read the word "perfect" in the New Testament, we might better understand it to mean "perfected." When Jesus says, "Be perfect," in Matthew 5:48, he means "Be perfected. Reach your goal. Go for the finish."

Here in the Book of James, we meet another familiar word in the New Testament, the word "above." The Book of James says, "Every perfect gift... is from above." Well, that word "above" is the same word Jesus used when he told Nicodemus that one "must be born again" to see the kingdom of heaven. The phrase "born again" means, literally, to be "born from above." John 3:3 says that one must be born from above in order to see the kingdom of heaven.

Every perfect gift, then, according to the Epistle of James, has the same characteristic of those seeing the kingdom of heaven. A perfect gift carries something with it "from above." Could giving, and receiving, the perfect gift be like being born again? Yes, I think so. A perfect gift is that which carries some element of the divine, a heavenly glory, that comes from outside and above us. Every good gift, then, carries perfection with it when it comes with something "from above," something holy, something of God. Every good gift, delivering something holy, is the perfect gift.

But here's the thing. I hope we have all experienced giving, or receiving, that gift that became so perfect when we realized how personal it was. It came from who we are authentically; or it came to us with a sense of who the giver authentically is. Its honesty and authenticity and personal-ness is what touched us.

Thus, every perfect gift also carries some element of authentic humanity. Every perfect gift does not merely carry divinity. A perfect gift is also something that quite clearly comes from within us, to another person. A perfect gift delivers

something of our authentic self to that other person.

Could it be that, ultimately, something of our authentic self, and something of the divine (from above) are the same thing? We are born again, and born from above, when we realize God; and we are born again, born from above, when we realize our true and authentic selves. And when we give of who we are, when we give of our authentic selves, we are giving the good gift that comes from above; we are giving the perfect gift. Every good gift, from within and from above, is the perfect gift.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sam Candler". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

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