

GIFTS FROM GOD

“Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.” – 2 Cor. 9:15

No time of the year illustrates the grace of giving more than the Yuletide season. Mountains of gifts under myriad trees all symbolize this attribute. Even the dark cloud of holiday commercialism has the silver lining of generosity. Charity drives reap their richest harvest during December.

It is only fitting that it should be so. The central reason for the holiday itself is in commemoration of the greatest gift ever given. In fact it demonstrates two great gifts – the gift of God in sending his only son to die for humanity, and the gift of the Son in his willing compliance with this mission of sacrifice.

“For God so loved the world, that he gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” – John 3:16

This gift of God’s Son forms the center hub of the entire Biblical narrative. The heart of the Scriptural concept of salvation is the doctrine of substitutionary atonement – the ransom.

This doctrine is simply summarized by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:21, 22: “For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.”

MORE THAN THE GIFT OF LIFE

But the gift of God is more than the gift of life. The Apostle Peter speaks of these additional gifts which God gives in 2 Peter 1:3 –

“According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness.”

While the death of Christ guarantees an opportunity for all to receive life, it does not guarantee godliness. Life, without godliness, is but a temporary gift. Such life would soon be lost, even as Adam and Eve originally lost it in the Garden of Eden.

Godliness is not innate. It must be obtained. It consists in the living of one’s life according to godly principles. These principles must be learned. They are not instinctive. Therefore, man, though alive, must be instructed in the laws of righteousness in order to maintain that life.

This educational process which God has planned for man is metaphorically described by the prophet Isaiah as a highway—a “highway of holiness.” It is briefly described in Isaiah 35:8-10 –

“And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called, The way of [or, the way that leads to] holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those [for their education, so that they may be no longer unholy]; the wayfaring men, though fools [or, uneducated in the rules of right and wrong], shall not err therein. [For they shall learn how to obey that which is right.] No lion [Satan, or his angels], nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall walk there: and the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.”

“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.” – James 1:17

OUR GIFTS TO GOD

“God loveth a cheerful giver.” --2 Cor. 9:7

Seeing the magnificence of God’s gifts to us, what shall we give to God?

The poet, John Greenleaf Whittier, phrased it well when he wrote:

*No offering of my own I have,
Nor works, my faith to prove;
I can but give the gifts he gave,
And plead his love for love.*

“*I can but give the gifts he gave.*” As he gave his life for us, have we any other choice but to, in turn, give our life for him. In 2 Corinthians 5: 14, 15, the Apostle Paul presents this very thought:

“For the love of Christ constraineth us [leaves us no alternative]; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.”

Defining our gift to God even further, the Apostle Paul pens in Romans 12:1—

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.”

GIFTS FOR OTHERS ARE GIFTS FOR GOD

This gift-giving is not limited to the gift we give to God of our own lives dedicated to His service. We must have an attitude of love and generosity toward others as well.

Jesus himself illustrated this in his parable of “THE SHEEP AND THE GOATS.” There, in commending the gift-giving nature of the “sheep,” they challenged him by asking, “*Lord, when saw we Thee an hungered, and fed Thee? Or thirsty, and gave Thee drink?*” (Matthew 25:37)

His response in verse 40 establishes the principle of charity and generosity:

“Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto Me.”

PRINCIPLES OF GIVING

How, then should Christians emulate their God in the matter of the giving of gifts?

CHEERFULLY: “God loveth a cheerful giver.” -- 2 Corinthians 9:7

QUIETLY: “Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them; otherwise ye have no reward of your Father Which is in heaven.” – Matthew 6:1

DISCERNINGLY: “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.” -- Galatians 6:10

MOTIVATED BY LOVE: “And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity [love], it profiteth me nothing.” – 1 Corinthians 13:3

COMPASSIONATELY: “But whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?” – 1 John 3:17

LIBERALLY: “The liberal soul shall he made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself.” – Proverbs 11:25

Such as respond to God’s great gift by giving to others freely themselves shall reap a rich reward:

“For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, which ye have showed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.” – Hebrews 6:10