

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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OUR GREAT GIFT-GIVING GOD

Christmas time. There is no other time of the year, as far as I am concerned, that can even begin to measure up to this joyous season. The sights and sounds, not to mention the food, all contribute to making this the most memorable time of the year. Is there anything more calculated to bring smiles to our faces than the way little children light up on Christmas morning? We love giving and receiving presents and this is the thing that we usually remember the most, long after the season has passed. In light of this consider the way the Bible accents this theme. “God so loved the world that he gave . . .” (John 3:16). “Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift” (II Cor. 9:15). The Wise Men bowed before the Holy Babe and *presented* him with gold, frankincense, and myrrh (Matt. 2:11). “In these few lines,” wrote Wernecke, “we have the pure, unalloyed spirit of Christmas-giving which should and frequently does characterize the Nativity season. Giving to shut-ins, to inmates of hospitals and other institutions, to servicemen away from home – these and many more are expressions of unselfish giving. Boxing Day, while no longer observed commonly under that name, is with us in another form. Centuries ago it was customary in England on December 26 to give Christmas boxes to servants and those who performed public services – to tradesmen, mailmen, police, street sweepers, milkmen, cabmen, newsboys, and the like. Most of us recognize all these and others in modern form. Is it not common for employers to be confronted by not merely expectations of but demands for a Christmas bonus? But there is a third kind of giving that should be clearly distinguished from the above – the exchange of presents. While it, no doubt, constitutes the great bulk of Christmas merchandising (the Christmas trade being estimated at fourteen billion in 1950), it can, rightly used, be the means of establishing cordial, warm relationships in families and among friends.”¹

I. THE FATHER’S GIFTS TO HIS SON

“The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand” (John 3:35). Notice the words “all things.” We read elsewhere in the New Testament of the Father’s donation to the Son (John 13:3; Matthew 11:27; Luke 10:22). What does “all things” (as in the ESV, or “everything” as the NIV reads) mean? The Angel Gabriel declares that “the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David” (Luke 1:32). He is given power and authority (Matthew 9:8; John 11:22; 17:2). Judgment has been handed over to Him (John 5:22, 27). Seven times He declares that believers have been given Him by His Father (John 6:37; 10:29; 17:2, 6, 9, 24; 18:9). Because the Father *gave* them to His Son, they are His and He will never lose any one of them (John 6:39) because He has *given* them to eternal life (John 17:2). The Father *gave* Him a work to accomplish (John 17:4) and He has completed it. “People do not come to Christ because it seems to them a good idea. It never does seem a good idea to natural man. Apart from a divine work in their souls (cf. John 16:8), men remain contentedly in their sins. Before men can come to Christ, it is necessary that the Father *give* them to Him.”² In John 17:7, Jesus says that the “all things” given Him are from the Father. This may sound a bit redundant at first, but consider this. God the Father is *giving* to the Son that which is His. It is impossible to *give* away something that is really not yours to *give*. The Father *gives* the Son His name (17:11, 12). The Son is here affirming that He possesses the very nature and character of God. Likewise, He later declares the Father has *given* Him *glory* (17:22, 24). Part of that *glory* included the cross, whereby He brought *glory* to God and

accomplished redemption (John 18:11).

II. GOD'S GIFT OF HIS SON TO THE WORLD

James 1:5 says that God *gives* generously to all. A few verses later we read "every good and perfect *gift* is from the Father" (James 1:17). In Matthew 7:11, Jesus says, "Your Father in heaven *gives* good gifts." Acts 17:25 declares that God "*gives* to all life and breath and all things." God's choicest gifts, however, are spiritual. The disciples, declares Jesus, are *given* the mystery of the Kingdom (Mark 4:11). It was the Father's good pleasure to *give* this to them (Luke 12:32). Jesus *gives* them authority over the demons (Mark 6:7). Our Lord *gives* peace that is not of the world and can be known only by His own (John 14:27). The greatest *gift* is God's *gift* of eternal life (Romans 6:23). This is supremely a *gift* of God's grace (Ephesians 2:8). This was purchased by Christ who *gave* His life (living and dying) so that He might *give* eternal life to His own (John 6:27, 33; 10:28). God's love is demonstrated in the *giving* of His only begotten Son (John 3:16). The nature of God's giving His Son is described by the Apostle Paul in Romans 3:25 where God displays His justice and His love by giving His Son to be a propitiatory sacrifice for sin. There is simply no way to adequately describe this marvelous gift of God (2 Corinthians 9:15).³

III. GOD'S GIFT OF THE SPIRIT

Over and over again we are told that we cannot receive anything unless it is *given* to us (Matthew 19:11; John 3:27). Contrary to popular teaching in many Evangelical circles, we cannot turn to Christ in saving faith unless we are efficaciously drawn by the Father (John 6:65); we do not naturally possess the capacity to receive the gift of God (Mark 8:12; John 19:9). God, therefore, *gives* the Spirit (1 Thessalonians 4:8). It is the Spirit of truth who is *given* us (John 14:16-17). But He could not be *given* until Jesus was glorified (John 7:39).⁴ God gives us His Spirit as a deposit of what is to come (2 Corinthians 1:22; 5:5) and for the assurance of abiding in God (1 John 4:13).

CONCLUSION: Here at Christmas time, we *give* gifts to one another. There is nothing innately wrong with this. We are told in Acts 20:35 that "it is more blessed to give than to receive." We are called upon to give. In Romans 14:12, Paul speaks of the responsibility of *giving* account of oneself to God. We must remember that failure to give (or wrong giving) is also found in the New Testament. People fail to give glory to God (Acts 12:23). The Apostle Paul was concerned about the danger of *giving* occasion to stumble (2 Corinthians 6:3). He warns the Ephesians not to *give* place to the Devil (Ephesians 4:27). We are obligated to *give* praise and glory to God (Revelation 4:9; 14:7; 19:6, 7). We have received so much and to whom much is given much is required (Luke 12:48). May God help us all to take stock of the things we have received and may He grant to us an ever increasing recognition of His matchless gift of salvation which Christ has accomplished for us.

ENDNOTES

¹ Herbert H. Wernecke, Christmas Customs Around the World (The Westminster Press, 1959) p. 36.

² Morris, The Gospel According to John (Eerdmans, 1979), p. 367.

³ The Apostle Paul in this passage refers to God's grace as HUPERBALLΩ. This word means to throw beyond, to surpass. It literally means superabundant. It speaks of a degree which exceeds extraordinarily a point on an implied or overt scale of extent. See J. P. Louw and E. A. Nida, Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domain I (United Bible Societies, 1988), p. 689. God's gift is further described with the adjective "indescribable!" This is the Greek word ANEKDIΩGΩTOS which declares that something cannot be expressed adequately or set forth in any great detail. The word translated "gift," ΔΩΡΕΑ is also expressive. It means something that is freely given at no cost (cf. Romans 3:24; compare with Galatians 2:21, 2 Thessalonians 3:8). In John 15:25, Jesus uses the word when he says, "They hated me without reason." Here the word ΔΩΡΕΑΝ means "without cause or grounds."

⁴ "It is the dawning of the new age that was signaled by Pentecost, and that is why Peter's quotation of Joel's prophecy is so significant. According to all four Gospels, John the Baptist predicted that Jesus Messiah would usher in that age: *he* would baptize his people in the Holy Spirit. Jesus, especially in the Gospel of John, explicitly connects his death, resurrection, and exaltation with the coming of the Spirit. His return to the Father via the cross and the empty tomb is the necessary condition for the Spirit's coming (e.g., John 7:39; 16:7). Indeed, the Holy Spirit, that 'other Counselor,' is in certain respects Jesus' replacement during this period between the 'already' and the 'not yet' so characteristic of New Testament eschatology; he is the means by which the Father and the Son continue to manifest themselves to believers (e.g., John 14:23)." D. A. Carson, Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14 (Baker, 1987), p. 154.