

GIVING AND RECEIVING GIFTS

Romans 12:3-13

November 17 and 24, 2019

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I turned on the car radio a couple of days before Halloween hoping to hear a few golden oldies, when what did I hear, but Christmas music! I wasn't quite ready for that just yet, so I quickly went to an alternate station

Maybe I wouldn't mind it so much if the content was about the birth of Jesus, but it wasn't about the manger or wise men or peace on earth – it was more about the material aspect of the holiday.

With the idea of gifts being so central to the observances taking place this time of year, it seems appropriate to consider some of the gifts given to us by God, our Creator and Provider.

To begin, just what is a “gift” anyway?

It's something given willingly and without payment – you don't buy a gift someone offers you.

A gift doesn't have to be a thing you receive in a box, but perhaps a form of assistance; help

Heckathorn Church in a time of disability – a true gift given to Kristine and me

A gift can be a very easy task or opportunity.

A line drive to the second baseman in the bottom of the ninth might be seen as a gift.

A gift can be a natural ability.

Some are gifted with musical ability.

Others have administrative capabilities.

Others are gifted teachers, carpenters, electricians or doctors.

Each is utilizing something God has gifted them with.

So gifts take on a lot of forms – each special, each appreciated, each of value.

Why might someone give a gift to another?

*Symbol of **love and respect***

We give Christmas presents to family members and friends to show those feelings.

Shouldn't give a Christmas present just because it's Christmas and expected, but rather

use the occasion to express those feelings to someone, as did the Wise Men

on the first Christmas – gifts that showed honor, respect for Jesus.

*We give gifts to **provide for a need***

Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners for example

T'giving meals provided by IUMC, or I like to give to the City Rescue Mission in New

Castle on Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter to provide special meals for someone

*And we might give a gift to someone to help them **accomplish** something*

My Dad gave me a Bible when I finished seminary – still use it, pretty beat up (RSV)

A district superintendent (Fred Hunt) gave me some liturgical tools for ministry.

You might give a student a computer for school, or money for tuition.

All good reasons to give someone a gift

*When you offer a gift to someone the criteria to consider would include what that person **likes**, what they **need** and what will be **useful** to them.*

If someone gave me a motorcycle tire for Christmas, I'd be delighted.

Mine is wearing out and they aren't cheap; it's something I like, and something I can use.

It would be a great gift.

But give that tire to my mother or my wife, they'd probably be offended by it.

They have no interest in that stuff and no use for it, so it would be a terrible gift.

So, for a gift to be of value and appreciated it has to meet that basic criteria

And what do you do with a gift when you receive it?.

*Well, if it's wrapped up, you have to **open it** – doesn't accomplish much sitting under the tree.*

*And once it's opened, you need to **use it** to appreciate it.*

Remember that scene from the movie, "A Christmas Story" where Ralphie and Randy open up packages of socks and toss them aside?

Maybe useful, but not something they'd like

So, what does this have to do with anything religious? Quite a lot, actually.

God gives us many, many gifts over the course of our lives.

We are given the gift of life, the essentials needed to sustain life.

The beauty of the earth, the blessings of family, friendships and church

Skills and opportunities to make a living as well as serve others

*And the greatest gift of all – **Jesus Christ**, God's only Son, and His gift of **Salvation***

More on that in a moment

There are at least 2 dozen gifts listed in the Bible (provide list in bulletin – briefly review)

These spiritual gifts are given to every one of us who says, "Yes" to Jesus as Lord, Savior

Some of us have one gift, some a couple, some several like in the parable of Talents. (review)

One gift is not any more important than another, each has its application.

They complement one another rather than compete

What's needed at the moment? Who has the right tool for the job at hand?

*"Let me be **employed** for thee, or **laid aside** for thee." (Wesley)*

So you might ask, "Why would God choose to give a gift of any description to any of us?"

Well, it would be for the same reasons we give gifts to one another.

Out of love; to provide for a need; or to enable us to accomplish something

In reference to God's gifts they help us fulfill our personal potential – help us be all we can be.

*God's gifts help us **carry out** His divine work – we are God's hands, feet, voice*

These gifts make it possible for us to supplement and complement each other.

None of us can do God's work alone – you do some, pastors & church staff do some;

Mission workers in other places do some with our help and support

As with any gift, if you don't put it to use, it's of no value.

If I get something for Christmas and leave it in the box or put it in a drawer it's of no value and it might even be insulting to the giver of the gift.

Now maybe I receive something that doesn't fit, so I take it back to the store and exchange it.

That would make something I can't use, useful, BUT God knows exactly what I can use, what I need, what I can put to use – a gift from God is going to fit.

It wouldn't be appropriate for me to say, "Well, I don't really care for this gift of teaching. I'd like to exchange it for prophecy."

The thing is, God didn't create me to be a prophet.

My goal should be to become exactly what God created me to be.

Nothing more; nothing less – and God provides the gifts we need to do just that.

We can choose not to use whatever gift we've been given, but that's not only to the detriment of God's Kingdom, but a detriment to joyful fulfillment in one's own life.

The holiday season which is about to begin runs from Thanksgiving to New Year and even up to Epiphany if you happened to be Orthodox, and during that time there is a lot of emphasis on the giving of gifts.

The tradition of giving gifts at Christmas originates with a couple of events.

Around the time of Jesus' birth the Romans celebrated Saturnalia.

It was an agricultural celebration held around the winter solstice.

There was a lot of undisciplined conduct associated with it and along with all the merry making, the giving of gifts.

Christmas came to be celebrated at that time, probably to blend in with the surrounding culture.

Gift giving is also associated with the gifts of the Wise Men, the Three Kings from the East

The gifts were quite specific to the Christ-child:

*Gold – gift for a **king***

*Frankincense – gift for a **priest***

*Myrrh – gift for one would **die***

So, because gifts were given to Jesus, we give them to each other.

As a result, everyone is out there trying to sell something around this time of year.

There are expectations to give

You may not want to give a gift, or maybe can't really afford it, or don't know what to give

So it becomes a source of real stress.

And on the receiving end, you may be given something you really can't use and that is stressful.

You don't want to offend someone who has given that gift to you.

A couple years ago, Carolyn gave me a gift for Father's Day that I wasn't too sure about.

It was a day at the "Go Ape" venue over in North Park.

Kind of an obstacle course with ropes and zip lines – all kinds of challenges

And it was the challenges that concerned me

How would a guy in his mid 60s hold up in that setting?

Maybe I'd be lacking what it takes for the various tasks – look bad

But I accepted and did okay and it gave me confidence as a result of doing something I wasn't so sure I could do – a good gift.

It's like that with the spiritual gifts God gives each of us as well.

Maybe you've received one of those gifts on the list, but set it aside because you're not so sure you could do something like that.

If you do set it aside, it doesn't do you, others or the Kingdom of Christ any good.

And maybe, just maybe, if you take up the challenge, you find God can do a lot through you.

*When we **apply** those gifts it's fulfilling, rewarding, purposeful and significant.*

That's why God wants us to have them.

And consider today, most of all, the greatest of the gifts God provides – the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, providing us with forgiveness, direction in life and assurance of eternal life.

It is what I am most grateful for at Thanksgiving.

It is the central, and really the only purpose for celebrating Christmas.

It is an incentive to begin a new year with renewed purpose and dedication.

So, don't be stressed by the holiday demands of what to give or how to receive what is given.
Instead, look to the gifts that continue to give long past a short span of time, even to eternity;
the gifts of the Spirit for the time we dwell here and the gift of Salvation for all time to come.