

The Gifts of God

*“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*

For centuries the year's end has been a season for the giving of gifts. It is a beautiful custom, the practice of which temporarily lifts the world out of its otherwise self-seeking course. It gives millions a taste of the revolutionary changes which will result in human relationships

when, under the laws of Christ's kingdom, the unselfish spirit of giving takes the place of the selfish spirit of grasping.

The Spirit of Giving

The spirit of giving is the Spirit of God, and he is the greatest of all givers. Giving manifests the spirit of love, and “God is love.” (I John 4:16) The love of God which prompts him to give is described by the Greek word *agape*, which in our *King James Version* of the Bible is sometimes translated “charity.” (I Cor. 13:1-13; Col. 3:14; I Tim. 1:5) The original and true meaning of charity is the act of giving to those in need, where there is no hope of repayment. This is truly the case with respect to

the gifts of God, both to his people and to the world in general.

Nothing that any of God's creatures can give to him would add to his riches, and regardless of what they might withhold, he would not be made poor. He gives because he loves, and the rejoicing of those who receive his gifts is his joy. This, we believe, is true even in the case of his human creation, and despite the present fallen and dying condition of man. Solomon expressed this thought, saying, "Every man also to whom God hath given riches and wealth, and hath given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labour; this is the gift of God."—Eccles. 5:19

This text describes what should be the sheer joy of living here on the earth as a natural man. All the natural things which contribute to this joy are the gifts of God. We are reminded of this in the Genesis record of the creation of man, in which we are told of the garden which God prepared for his human creation "eastward in Eden." In that garden, we are told God placed "every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food." (Gen. 2:8,9) It was all designed for the joy and blessing of man. David wrote, "The heaven, even the heavens, are the LORD's: but the earth hath he given to the children of men."—Ps. 115:16

In bestowing the blessings which make for human happiness God has been impartial. Jesus assures us that his Heavenly Father causes the sun to shine and the rain to fall on the evil and the good, the just and the unjust. (Matt. 5:45) It is true, of course, that during the dark night of sin and death, when God has been permitting evil to

reign, there is no assurance to any individual or group of enjoying an adequate share of the natural earthly blessings. Today, it is estimated that ten percent of the human race exists on scanty provisions of food and other necessities of life.

This is largely because of human selfishness. The failure to provide adequate means of distribution prevents the bounties which the earth provides to be shared in measure by all. The Lord's own people, living in various parts of the world, are subject to the conditions with which they are surrounded, sharing the common experiences of the world, whether they be lean or full. These have learned, as did the great Apostle Paul, to be content with whatever God's providence may permit, whether they "abound" or at times "suffer need." (Phil. 4:11-13) They have learned that "godliness with contentment is great gain."—I Tim. 6:6

The Gift of Salvation

In order to be a member of God's family, and to sense the sweetness of the blest "tie that binds our hearts in Christian love," it was necessary to be a partaker of God's gift of salvation. Although we say the gift of salvation, we could have as well said the gift of God's dear Son, or the gift of eternal life through his Son. (John 3:16; Rom. 6:23) "By grace are ye saved through faith," wrote Paul, "and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God."—Eph. 2:8

This wonderful gift of salvation through Christ had to be preceded by another gift of God, the gift of discernment. When Peter said to Jesus, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," Jesus replied to him, "Flesh and blood hath not revealed

it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.” (Matt. 16:15-17) We cannot know and enjoy the true meaning of God’s gifts and their resulting blessings by reason of our own ability to interpret the Scriptures. Human reasoning—“flesh and blood”—is not able to discern the “mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.” This also is a gift of God.—Matt. 13:11

Psalms 119:144 reads, “The righteousness of thy testimonies is everlasting: give me understanding, and I shall live.” The “testimonies” of the Lord are his declarations, promises, and laws which reveal his divine plan and purpose. It is only those to whom he gives understanding that are able to grasp their meaning, and it is through their obedience to this God-given understanding that they receive everlasting life. To merely know something of God’s plans and purposes does not put one in the way of life. Indeed, it is through such understanding that we learn to know God, but it is when we know him, and yield ourselves in complete and hearty submission to his will, that his gift of life through Jesus becomes ours. In prayer to his Heavenly Father Jesus said, “This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.”—John 17:3

“All Things”

Paul wrote, “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?” (Rom. 8:32) This is a wonderful promise! It does not mean, of course, that the Lord gives his people all that they might desire of temporal blessings and

advantages. The reference is to the spiritual needs of the consecrated people of God. These are all supplied, and abundantly so, in keeping with the riches of God's grace through Christ Jesus.—Eph. 1:7

In the context of the promise of "all things," Paul asks, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" (Rom. 8:35) The devil uses discouragement to do so. Paul continues, "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth?" (vss. 33,34) Certainly it is not God who condemns his people, for he has made provision through Christ Jesus for the forgiveness of their unwilling imperfections. From him we have received the gift of forgiveness.—Col. 1:14

Failing to separate us from the love of Christ through discouragement based upon our sins, then other methods are tried. Shall we be separated by "tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" Paul, quoting from the Old Testament, then says, "For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are counted as sheep for the slaughter." In all these things, however, we can be "more than conquerors through him that loved us."—Rom. 8:35-37; Ps. 44:22

We can be conquerors in all these things, not in our own strength, but because God, through Christ, has freely given unto us all things needful in order to be overcomers. The difficult situations that the Lord's people face in various parts of the world would, from the natural standpoint, be cause for fear and defeat. However, as Paul wrote to Timothy, God has not given us the "spirit of fear," but the spirit of "power, and of love, and of a sound mind."—II Tim. 1:7

The spirit of power is the Holy Spirit. One of its many functions in our lives as Christians is to give us strength for our every time of need. At times our needs seem very great. One trial follows another in quick succession. At times the Lord may permit us to be severely tested along several lines at once. The enemy often will “come in like a flood” to overwhelm us. (Isa. 59:19) Nevertheless, as David wrote, “The LORD sitteth upon the flood; yea, the LORD sitteth King for ever.” In other words, he is in full control of every situation, and as David further promised, “The LORD will give strength unto his people; the LORD will bless his people with peace.” —Ps. 29:10,11

“The LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.” (Ps. 84:11) God will freely give us all things that are good for our spiritual growth in Christ Jesus. These are embodied in his gift of the Holy Spirit. Speaking to his disciples, and in anticipation of what his Heavenly Father would do for his consecrated people, beginning at Pentecost, Jesus said, “If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?” —Luke 11:13

God's Power

The Holy Spirit is the holy power and influence of God, by which he accomplishes all his works. The inspirational power of his promises, recorded in his Word under his direction, is one of the means by which he strengthens his people. The Scriptures,

inspired by the Holy Spirit, were given in order that the man of God might be “thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” (II Tim. 3:16,17) In all things God has made provision for us through his Word, and thus we are completely furnished to accomplish his will and works.

God’s promise to give strength unto his people is a source of great inspiration and encouragement. To know that God is for us, to really believe that he is helping us in every time of need, serves to help us over many difficult places in the narrow Christian way. (Matt. 7:14) We can press on because we know that greater is he who is for us than all they that are against us. (Rom. 8:31) The great battle may rage around us, but because the Lord has promised to strengthen and protect, we enjoy the “peace of God, which passeth” all human understanding.—Phil. 4:7

The promises of God are not empty words. He strengthens and protects his people, and information is given us in his Word as to how he does this. We read, “He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.” (Ps. 91:11) What a precious gift this is to the people of God. We read again, “The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.”—Ps. 34:7

We have never seen an angel, and our human minds cannot understand how these heavenly beings accomplish their work. We know, however, that they exist, that they are powerful, and that they are willing and ready always to do God’s bidding. In addition, they know the Heavenly Father’s will for his people. Jesus said, in this connection,

that the angels “always behold the face” of his Father in heaven. (Matt. 18:10) They are in intimate contact with our God. They know his will for us and are prompt to do his bidding. His mighty power is exercised through them to “keep” us in all our ways.

Another of the gifts of God to his people of the present time is the privilege of suffering for, and with, Christ. Paul wrote, “Unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.” (Phil. 1:29) It requires great faith to appreciate this gift. The privilege of suffering with Christ is, however, a very precious gift; for, if we are faithful in thus suffering, even unto death, it will lead to association with him in glory: “If we suffer, we shall also reign with him.”—II Tim. 2:12

The Joy Set Before Him

In Hebrews 2:10 we read that it was God’s plan “in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.” The thought is that the “many sons” are also brought to glory through a pathway of suffering. Thus, just as the Heavenly Father did not shield Jesus from suffering, there is no reason to suppose that he will do so for us. However, God did provide a compensating portion for the Master: it was the “joy that was set before him,” which, as the apostle explains, enabled him to endure “the cross, despising the shame.”—Heb. 12:2

These same joys are set before us, the greatest of which is the prospect of seeing our Heavenly Father and our Lord Jesus face-to-face, and of spending

eternity with them as members of the divine family. (I John 3:2) David wrote, "In thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore." (Ps. 16:11) Jesus entered into this joy after his resurrection. The apostle affirms that he "is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."—Heb. 12:2

This glorious inheritance was first given to Jesus by promise. To be at the right hand of the throne of God meant the glorious privilege of carrying out the Father's loving kingdom plan for the blessing of all the families of the earth. The promise was that the "pleasure" of Jehovah would prosper in the hands of Jesus. By faith Jesus laid hold of these precious promises, and they served as a bulwark of strength while he was making "his soul an offering for sin."—Isa. 53:10

In prayer to his Father, Jesus said of his disciples, and those who would believe on him through their word, "The glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one. ... Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou has given me [by promise]: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world." (John 17:22,24) What a gift!—"The glory which thou gavest me I have given them." It means that all the exceeding great and precious promises which inspired and encouraged Jesus belong also to us, and are among the means which God is using to fortify us against the attacks of the world, the flesh, and the Devil.

One of the promises to Jesus was, "I shall give thee the heathen [Hebrew: nations or people] for

thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.” (Ps. 2:8) We read further of God: “He hath shewed his people the power of his works, that he may give them the heritage of the heathen. The works of his hands are verity and judgment; all his commandments are sure.” (Ps. 111:6,7) God has shown us the power of his works. He has opened the eyes of our understanding to see and appreciate his great plan of salvation—the redemption through Christ Jesus, his covenants, his promised kingdom, the “great salvation” of the church, and the “restitution of all things” for the world.—Heb. 2:3; Acts 3:20,21

Through the outworking of this plan we see the mighty power of God in operation. That power gave strength to the Old Testament heroes of faith, enabling them to endure while they were being prepared to occupy, in the earthly phase of the kingdom, the position of “princes in all the earth.” (Ps. 45:16; Heb. 11:1-40) This same mighty power of God comforted and strengthened Jesus, and raised him from the dead. By faith we see God’s power in operation in the first resurrection of the church, and by faith we anticipate the manifestation of divine power in the resurrection of all the dead.—I Cor. 15:20-23; Rev. 20:6; John 5:28,29

God promised Jesus that he would be given the nations for an inheritance, and throughout the present age he has been helping the church to enter into this same inheritance. Not only has it been given us to see and know the mysteries of the kingdom—the many glorious features of God’s plan—but all of the Lord’s people have experienced the mighty power of God in their own lives as they are

being prepared to enter into their future inheritance with the glorified Jesus.—Col. 1:12,13

How inspiring are the promises of the Bible pertaining to the various aspects of our inheritance. Through the Prophet Isaiah God said, “I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages; That thou mayest say to the prisoners, Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Shew yourselves.”—Isa. 49:8,9

Other aspects of our inheritance are promised by Jesus’ statement: “To him that overcometh will I give” ... a crown of life; the hidden manna; power over the nations; the morning star; white raiment; make a pillar in the temple of my God; to sit with me in my throne. (Rev. 2:10,17,26,28; 3:5,12,21) All these promises pertain to our prospect of reigning with Jesus in his kingdom. He knew that it was his Father’s will that his followers should share these honors and blessings with him, for he had said while still with his disciples in the flesh, “Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”—Luke 12:32

Our Gift to God

How many and manifold are the gifts of God to us! Truly they are more than can be numbered. In return he asks but one gift from us: “My son, give me thine heart.” (Prov. 23:26) To give our hearts to the Lord means to give him our all. It means that we will search his Word to determine his will for us at every step of the Christian way in which we walk. In this also there is great joy, great peace of mind, for we are assured of being guided aright,

and of hearing the voice of the Word of God saying, “This is the way, walk ye in it.”—Isa. 30:21

Without this infallible guide, the world strays aimlessly through life, burdened with its cares, and fearful of what each day’s experiences might bring. How wonderful it is, though, to have given our hearts to God, and to let him be our guide, as we endeavor to do his will and work. It is in thus giving our hearts to him that we receive one of the most precious of his present gifts. Jesus said, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”—Matt. 11:28-30

How precious is this rest which the Lord has given to his people. It is enjoyed by all true Christians, wherever they may be, and regardless of their circumstances of life. The measure of this rest is in proportion to our faith in the divine arrangements, faith in God’s dealings with us, faith in the provision he has made through the Redeemer, faith in his ability to fulfill his promises, and faith in all the means of grace which he has provided.—Rom. 1:16,17; Heb. 11:1,6; I Tim. 6:12

As we look ahead to the New Year before us, may it be with a “faith that will not shrink, though pressed by every foe; that will not tremble on the brink of any earthly woe.” We do not know what the future holds for us individually. Therefore, let us live today as though tomorrow we would hear those welcome words: “Well done, thou good and faithful servant: ... enter thou into the joy of thy lord.”—Matt. 25:21 ■