

# The Great Giver of Gifts

*“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 IS THE SEASON OF**

the year when a large part of the world commemorates the birth of Jesus. While there is much celebration of the event, and the term Christmas is on the lips of millions, yet the real significance of what is supposed to be the origin of

the joyfulness is often misunderstood, or even unknown. Actually, the 25th of December is not the true anniversary of Jesus' birth—the more nearly correct date likely being in early October—but followers of the Master are always glad for opportunities of praising God for his marvelous gift at any and all times of the year.

The celebration of Christmas, as a holiday, is participated in by millions who do not claim Christianity as their religion. In fact, active faith even in the most basic concepts of Christianity has probably never been at a lower ebb than it is today. According to recent statistics, though regular church

attendance in the United States is currently around only 30%, yet nearly 90% percent of the people will enthusiastically join in the celebration of Christmas. The likely reason is that it affords an opportunity for a brief respite from the dim outlook many have as a result of the large degree of individual, national, and international strife throughout the world.

There is a “good will” spirit associated with Christmas that is wholesome. For this short period in the year, at least, many get the idea that they should try to love their neighbors. During the brief time that this spirit prevails we are given a partial glimpse of what will be possible in the way of human happiness when the true spirit of Christ is controlling the hearts and lives of all each day of every year.

To those who know the realities of God’s plan for mankind, and who know of his love as it is revealed through that plan, this is a good time to be reminded that all the blessings we enjoy, both spiritual and material, represent the bounties of our God, the greatest giver of gifts. (James 1:17) God is love, and one of the principal ways in which he manifests his love is by his gifts. Many of these gifts are bestowed impartially upon both the evil and the good. The sunshine and the rain are among these. (Matt. 5:45) Others of his gifts are reserved for those who have become his people because they have manifested confidence in him and a sincere desire to serve him.

## **RECOUNTING GOD’S BLESSINGS**

The greatest blessings accrue from God’s gifts when they are accepted as being from him, and he

is given the glory. Indeed, the greatest of all his gifts, Christ Jesus, cannot bring a full and permanent blessing except upon the basis of acceptance. The Heavenly Father gave his Son in order that those who believe on him might have everlasting life. In order to be of permanent value, belief and acceptance of this gift are required, either now or in God's coming kingdom.

An appreciation of Jesus, the greatest of all gifts, can be best manifested by a whole-hearted acceptance of him, and by dedication to walk in his steps as well as by his example. It is, in fact, those who are so dedicated that God is specially dealing with at the present time. Indeed, he loves the entire world of mankind, and that love is revealed in his Word through the divine arrangement for enlightening and blessing the people during his promised kingdom soon to be established on the earth. (Matt. 6:10; Rev. 21:1-5) However, at this time true Christians are under God's peculiar care, and upon them he is showering the gifts of his love throughout the year. What rejoicing should be ours as we pause to examine these gifts, and to note how valuable and wonderful they truly are!

In homes throughout the world, loving parents will rejoice over their children as they watch them open gifts and express their joy and appreciation as they discover what the various packages contain. This childlike delight might well represent the humble appreciation we should manifest to our Heavenly Father, as we examine and reexamine his gifts to us. Referring to little children, the Master said, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 19:14) Should not the manner of children in joyful

appreciation of their gifts teach us to manifest our gratitude to God? Should we not show forth the childlike disposition which Jesus commended to those who would be worthy of a place with him in the heavenly kingdom?—Matt. 18:1-4

## **THE GREATEST GIFT**

As alluded to in our opening text, the greatest gift of all is that of God's beloved Son to be the Redeemer of all mankind. (Rom. 8:32; II Cor. 9:15) How much do we appreciate this gift? How are we manifesting our appreciation? Genuine gratitude for gifts is displayed in their proper use. Our appreciation of the Redeemer, therefore, is shown in the manner in which we accept him. A certain degree of thankfulness would be manifested simply by our acknowledgment of the need of a Redeemer, and a mental assent to the fact that Jesus fills that need. However, this is not full acceptance and appreciation of the gift.

In order to fully show our gratitude for God's gift of Jesus, we are invited to give our hearts to the Heavenly Father and learn of his ways. (Prov. 23:26) Such an appropriation of the gift is possible only through a full dedication of ourselves to do God's will. This means that we not only accept Jesus as our Redeemer, but that we look up to him as our guide and our head. (Eph. 5:23; Col. 1:18,19) It means, furthermore, that we are to follow in his footsteps of sacrifice and suffering which lead to death. (Matt. 16:24; Rom. 6:3-8; II Tim. 2:11,12) This is what is required for one to be a true Christian, and only through such an acceptance and use of God's gift of his Son, can we manifest full appreciation for it.

## **LIFE—ANOTHER GIFT**

Some may say that the greatest of all God's gifts is the gift of life, and in one way of looking at it, that is true. (Ps. 36:7-9) Certainly without life, no other gift of God could be accepted and enjoyed. However, life itself, so far as the human race was concerned, had been forfeited because of sin. (Rom. 3:10,23; 5:12) In order for life to be restored, the gift of the Redeemer was necessary. God is the fountain source of all life, and could bestow it upon his creatures without sacrifice to himself. When man sinned, however, and thus proved unworthy of the life that the Creator had provided, reconciliation for sin was necessary before life could be restored. To make provision for this God gave his Son as a "ransom for all," at great cost to himself, in order that the world might have life restored.—John 1:29; I Tim. 2:5,6; I John 2:1,2

Viewed thus, from the standpoint of the cost of the gift to the giver, we have the most outstanding manifestation of God's love in the giving of his Son. In this greatest of all gifts, we have a reminder of the grand attribute of the divine character which prompted it. "God so loved ... that he gave," is the way our text reads, and what he gave was his only Son, the most precious being of all his creation. If, then, we accept this gift, and do so in the spirit in which it was given, we will want to manifest our appreciation by what we give in return. Truly, nothing short of giving all we have can even begin to show adequate appreciation for such divine love!

## **THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**

Another important gift which the Heavenly Father bestows upon true Christians is that of the

Holy Spirit. Jesus tells us about this, saying, “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) Here Jesus indicates that the gift of the Holy Spirit is withheld until we ask for it. The reason for this is plain. None can receive the gift of the Holy Spirit unless they earnestly desire it and pray for it. It follows, also, that asking merely with the lips would not bring this gift. Such a request must be so genuine that one’s whole being is brought into harmony with it and is prepared to receive it.

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God—his mind, his disposition, his holy influence. It is his spirit which manifests the fruitage of “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, [and] temperance.” (Gal. 5:22,23) It is also the spirit of “power, ... and of a sound mind.” (II Tim. 1:7) It is, in short, all those qualities which are exemplified in God, and revealed through his Word. By God’s Holy Spirit, fully dedicated Christians are begotten to a new hope of life. (I Pet. 1:3) By it these are anointed to be ambassadors for Christ, and are sealed unto the day of deliverance. (II Cor. 5:20; Eph. 1:13; 4:30) This same Spirit bears witness with our spirits that we are the children of God.—Rom. 8:16

From this we can see that to ask for the Holy Spirit implies that we want to get rid of our own fallen fleshly spirit. It means then that as a prerequisite to our successful asking for the Holy Spirit, we must renounce self-will and seek to do God’s will to the best of our ability. If we truly desire to be filled with God’s spirit, it means that we want to be like him. If such be the case, we will do all in our

power to be emptied of self and the spirit of selfishness, that we may be filled and controlled with the divine spirit of love.

Such an infilling of the Holy Spirit cannot take place all at once, nor in answer to a single request. As Christians we must continue to pray for the Holy Spirit and prepare ourselves to receive it. The chief burden of all our prayers should be that the Spirit of God may take fuller control of our lives, and we should ever strive to be more completely emptied of self. (Ps. 23:3; 119:105; Prov. 3:5,6) There is nothing that more effectively stands in the way of being filled with the Spirit of God than the spirit of self and self-will. To want our way in everything means that God can have his way in nothing, so far as we are concerned. If we truly want his will done in our lives, then the gates of our hearts should always be open for him to come in and control our thoughts, words, and actions to the greatest extent possible. Thus, the Christian's sincere prayer for the Holy Spirit is a request for God to guide one's life.—Ps. 25:4,5; 86:11,12; Eph. 1:17,18

In order to be filled with the Holy Spirit it is necessary to do more than be emptied of self. Such a preparation alone would leave the way open to be filled with some other spirit. We must not only renounce our own will, but we must accept in its place the will of God. To accept his will, and to be filled with his Spirit, we must make use of the means he has provided. In addition to praying for his Spirit, we must also study his Word of Truth, the Bible. God's written Word is the means by which the Holy Spirit is directed into our hearts and lives and by which we are sanctified—that is, made holy.—John 17:17-19

God's Spirit inspired the writings of the Old Testament. God's Spirit came upon Jesus and inspired his ministry of precept and example. God's Spirit inspired the apostolic messages of the New Testament. In short, the Bible itself is the product of the Spirit of God. (II Pet. 1:21; II Tim. 3:16,17) As we study it and surrender our wills to its sacred influence, we partake of God's Spirit. What a wonderful provision God has made in his Word! How else could we know him, hence desire to be like him, unless he had revealed himself to us through the Scriptures? May we daily become more appreciative of this "boon most sacred from the Lord"—the Word of Truth.—*Hymns of Dawn*

## **SHOWERS OF BLESSING**

In addition to these outstanding gifts, the Heavenly Father is daily showering consecrated Christians with blessings, the extent of which is limited only by their appreciation and preparation for them. He gives joy—the joy of faith, the joy of service, the joy of fellowship, the joy of communion with him. He gives "grace to help in time of need." (Heb. 4:16) He provides divine guidance. He forgives our shortcomings. He gives wisdom and understanding. In short, God supplies all our needs. (Phil. 4:19) If he sees that we need trials, he gives them to us also, but never more than we can bear. (I Cor. 10:13) "No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly." (Ps. 84:11) We cannot fully comprehend what it means to dwell under such a canopy of divine love and protection. Neither can we fully appreciate how rich we have been made by the blessings he so bountifully metes out to us day



by day. We are truly recipients of grace divine.—  
Eph. 2:4-8

What can Christians do in return for such grace? In our association with each other, we sometimes feel under obligation to bestow a gift where one has been given to us. Is there anything we can give to God that will compensate him for what he has done for us? Surely there is nothing he needs in the way of material wealth. The cattle on a thousand hills are his; yea, the whole universe is his. (Ps. 50:10-12) God does not give solely with the motive of getting something in return. He gives because it is his nature to give. God is love, and because he is love, he gives. (I John 4:8-10; James 1:17) However, he does expect those of his intelligent creation that recognize this divine principle of love to respond in like fashion.

God makes it plain that there is a gift that we can bring to him which he will treasure very highly. It is something that he could not have unless we give it to him. He invites us to present this gift to him, even as we ask him to give us of his Holy Spirit. His invitation is, as quoted earlier in our lesson, "My son, give me thine heart." (Prov. 23:26) God has the power to create the universe. He is the source of all life, and whole nations to him are but the "small dust of the balance." (Isa. 40:15) Yet by his own law he will not interfere with our right to choose—our free will. Hence, God cannot have our hearts unless we give them to him.

How God treasures the gift of our hearts when we do give them to him! In the parable of the lost sheep, we are told that there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth. (Luke 15:4-7) This "one

sinner” in the larger lesson of the parable encompasses the entire human race. The lesson reveals the joy in heaven when those who at one time oppose the divine law turn and are obedient to it. What joy that brings to God and all the host of heaven!

To give God our hearts means that we will seek to know and to do his will. It means that the doing of his will thenceforth will be the uppermost ambition of life. If we give God our hearts without reservation, it will mean that no “heart strings” have been left attached to the things of the world or of the flesh, to be pulled at by the desires of the flesh or the influences of the world. In short, when we give God our hearts, we give him all we have. Its value to him is that it is a gift emanating from our innermost motives and affections.—Col. 3:1,2

Let us then, in giving our hearts to God make sure that our heart strings are attached only to him; and let us ask him to pull on those strings that we may be brought ever closer to him. May our hearts be so fully given over to the Lord that we will be glad to be drawn nearer to him, even if it may be by means of severe trials. As we carry out the terms of our walk as Christians, we should find the heavenly things pulling more and more strongly upon our heart strings; while the things of earth should be losing their appeal to us, and their power over us.

If our hearts, our affections, are set on things above, our treasures will be there also. (Matt. 6:19-21) Thus, we will be walking in “newness of life.” (Rom. 6:4) Our hopes, aims, and ambitions all will be new. Our work will be the work of God, and not our own work. Indeed, we will be coworkers with God, for he will be working in us “to will and to do of his

good pleasure," while we "work out [our] own salvation with fear and trembling."—Phil. 2:12,13

## **THE CHEERFUL GIVER**

There is considerable cheer connected with Christmas giving. Some of it is genuine, and some of it is not. Real joy comes from giving in the proper spirit. "It is more blessed to give than to receive," the Scriptures tell us. (Acts 20:35) This is especially true in connection with what we give to the Lord and to his service. Giving to the Lord should be done cheerfully, "not grudgingly," else it cannot be acceptable to him, "for God loveth a cheerful giver." (II Cor. 9:7) This is true not merely with respect to money matters, but in connection also with all the little sacrifices and giving of service to him and his cause.

If we would be pleasing to the Lord, we must bring our lives more and more into harmony with that attitude which he approves. There should be heartiness, cheerfulness, promptness, and zeal in every service we render. We cannot reluctantly serve the Lord and expect to be pleasing to him. Christians who have learned what a privilege they have of laying down their all on the altar of sacrifice and service, in the assurance that it will be acceptable through Christ to God, should greatly rejoice in that privilege.

If our vision of God as the greatest of all givers is clear, we will permit nothing to stand in the way of our knowing him better and serving him more faithfully. His love—manifested in all his wondrous promises, and revealed in his tender day by day care for us—should be constantly affecting our

hearts and lifting us up to the heights of communion and fellowship with him. Thus, our lives will be filled with blessings; not because we will have no trials, but because we have learned to know that God's will is best for eternal spiritual welfare. (Rom. 8:28) If our hearts are fully and cheerfully given to him, we will be able to trust him in all experiences, knowing that in the end he will bring us forth as gold; and that finally, by his abounding grace, we will be a diadem of glory in his loving hand.—I Pet. 1:7; Isa. 62:3

Happy are we then if this season of giving finds us more than ever appreciative of God's great gift to us of his Son—in fact, of all his gifts to us. Our joy will be increased if our hearts, minds, and actions are being drawn closer and closer to the Lord, and our lives filled and controlled ever more completely by his Spirit. "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift!"—II Cor. 9:15 ■