

The Source of All Gifts

“The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

—*Romans 6:23*

THE APOSTLE JAMES

calls our attention to God being the great giver of gifts when he wrote, “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) Not only does every good and perfect gift come from the Heavenly Father, but all truly good things are from him. It is not a matter of receiving some of our blessings from God, and some from other sources. Paul wrote, “What hast thou that thou didst not receive?” and on Mars’ hill he said that it is because of God that “we live, and move, and have our being.”—I Cor. 4:7; Acts 17:28

The material good things with which we are surrounded are gifts of God, as is the ability he has given us through our five senses to enjoy them. How wonderful is the daily portion of joys of which we are made conscious through the ability to touch, see, hear, taste and smell. Of little pleasure would be

the rose if we could neither see nor smell. The melodious harmony of music, whether produced by birds or by humans, would mean nothing if we could not hear. There would be only slight joy in eating if we could not taste.

Solomon wrote, "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) It is noteworthy, that in making provision for our first parents in the Garden of Eden, Jehovah provided trees that not only would be good for food, but also "pleasant to the sight." (Gen. 2:9) It was God's desire that his human creatures enjoy his provisions for them, and thus he designed that every function of life should be a pleasure.

In Psalm 115:16 we read, "The heaven, even the heavens, are the LORD'S: but the earth hath he given to the children of men." Despite man's rebellion against his Creator, he still receives bountifully from his hands. Jesus said that God "maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." (Matt. 5:45) The Heavenly Father is impartial in bestowing earthly blessings upon his creatures. It is man's sin and selfishness, as a result of Satan's evil influence, that have led to the inequalities and hardships which are everywhere apparent.

Christians who are walking in the way of sacrifice, following in the footsteps of Jesus, learn to accept with thankfulness what God provides along temporal lines, because they have faith to believe that divine wisdom knows what is best for them as New Creatures in Christ. (II Cor. 5:17) Paul wrote,

“I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: ... to be full and to be hungry.” (Phil. 4:11,12) If God permitted the great Apostle Paul to be hungry at times, we should not be surprised if he does not always make the bountiful earthly provision for us that we may think we need.

To Timothy, Paul wrote similar words, “Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.” (I Tim. 6:6,7) Job is an outstanding example of accepting the loss of earthly riches. In quick succession he lost his oxen, asses, sheep, camels, and his servants. Then word came to him that his sons and daughters were killed by a storm which demolished a house in which they were gathered. Job’s reply to these great calamities was, “Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.” (Job 1:21) Blessed is the Christian who has faith to believe in times of temporal loss that God, for one’s best spiritual welfare, sometimes takes away as well as gives.

SPIRITUAL BOUNTIES

While we properly rejoice in, and are thankful for, all the good earthly gifts which come to us from the “Father of lights,” our chief interest should be in his spiritual gifts, which can be enjoyed only upon the basis of faith. Fundamental among these is the gift of salvation and the hope of eternal life. Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:8, “By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the

gift of God,” and in our opening text he tells us that the “gift of God” is eternal life.

Salvation has been provided by God’s grace. It is his gift, as is the hope of eternal life. We accept these by faith. The gift of salvation was brought to man through Jesus, who said, “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) Paul speaks of Jesus as God’s “unspeakable gift,” for which we should ever give thanks.—II Cor. 9:15

Jesus was given to be man’s Redeemer nearly two thousand years ago, yet comparatively few of earth’s billions since have really appreciated this gift. The vast majority do not yet know the full meaning of the angelic message, “Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.”—Luke 2:10,11

If, through the understanding of God’s plan, we have grasped the depth of meaning contained in the angel’s announcement of Jesus’ birth, this too is the result of another gift from God. We read, “The righteousness of thy testimonies is everlasting: give me understanding, and I shall live.” (Ps. 119:144) We may not have used these exact words, but it is certain that before our eyes were opened to see the beauties of God’s plan we prayed earnestly for understanding. The Lord heard our prayers and “inclined” unto us, as it is stated in Psalm 40:1.

We recall the case of Peter. Jesus had asked his disciples what the public thought of him—who did the people say he was? Some thought he was John the Baptist; some thought he was the promised

Elijah; others believed that he was Jeremiah raised from the dead, or one of the other prophets. “But whom say ye that I am?” Jesus asked his disciples. Peter replied, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Then Jesus said to Peter, “Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.”—Matt. 16:13-17

No amount of “flesh and blood”—that is, human reasoning—will enable us to understand the divine purposes. To his disciples Jesus said, “It is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.” (Matt. 13:11) Although “holy men” of old, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, were recording many aspects of God’s plan as they centered in the Messiah, the Redeemer and Deliverer of mankind, neither they nor the angels were permitted to understand these truths. (Matt. 13:17; I Pet. 1:10-12; II Pet. 1:21) How grateful we should be for the gift of discernment that we have been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God!

THE HOLY SPIRIT

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 will give us of his Spirit—his holy influence—that we might be able to know and do his will! The ministry of the Holy Spirit which God gives to his consecrated people touches every aspect of our lives as New Creatures in Christ. It is a marvelous gift indeed!

By the Holy Spirit we are begotten to a new hope of life, even the divine nature. (II Pet. 1:4) God’s Spirit anoints, or authorizes, us to be ambassadors

for Christ, and, as ambassadors, to proclaim glad tidings to the meek and to bind up the broken-hearted. (Isa. 61:1) We are “sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise,” assured that if we remain faithful all our needs will be supplied, and that we will be given strength to remain faithful unto death, and thus receive the “crown of life.”—Eph. 1:13; Rev. 2:10

The Holy Spirit bears “witness” to us that we are the children of God, Paul wrote in Romans 8:16,17. This witness is given through the written Word which was “divinely inspired, ... so that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly fitted for every good work.” (II Tim. 3:16,17, *The Emphatic Diaglott*) “Thoroughly fitted”—how reassuring that through the gift of the Holy Spirit, everything we need as Christians is being supplied. We need only to be emptied of self that the Holy Spirit of God, in all its blessed ministrations, may fill and enrich our lives as we continue to set our affections on things above.—Col. 3:2

MINISTERING SPIRITS

The psalmist wrote, “He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.” (Ps. 91:11) God is not limited in the number, or kind, of messengers he can use in the guidance, care and protection of his people. He can even make the “wrath of man” to praise him. (Ps. 76:10) Today the Heavenly Father may use a brother or a sister in Christ to impart to us a blessing we most need. Tomorrow, if we are willing and prepared, he may use us as a messenger to help someone else over a rough place in the narrow way.

We believe, also, that God uses the holy angels as “ministering spirits” to serve those “who shall be heirs of salvation.” (Heb. 1:13,14) These, also, are his gifts to us, and what precious gifts they are! Speaking of our guardian angels, Jesus said that they “always behold the face” of the Heavenly Father. —Matt. 18:10

David wrote, “The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.” (Ps. 34:7) How reassuring is the word “encampeth.” Our guardian angels do not just occasionally come near to see how we are getting along. Rather, they encamp around us. As they do, and as they “always behold the face” of our Heavenly Father, whenever a need arises they have immediate access to him, and from him have that need supplied. We cannot ask for more!

THE MINISTRY OF SORROW

We are not to suppose that these wonderful gifts of God imply that we will escape all trial and suffering. Quite to the contrary, for one of God’s gifts is the privilege of suffering with and for Christ. We read, “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) The value of this gift is at once recognized when we remember that it is only if we suffer with Christ that we will be counted worthy to reign with him.—Rom. 8:16,17; II Tim. 2:12

Suffering with Christ is quite different from the trials and burdens of life with which we were all more or less weighed down before coming to the Lord and being lavished upon with all his bounteous

gifts. This contrast is brought to our attention by Jesus, when he 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

The Master has given us rest. The burden of care and worry with which we were once weighed down has been lifted. We have cast our burdens upon him, and he has given us peace in the assurance that God’s great plan of salvation is the solution for all the problems of the world. Our own perplexities, also, have been solved by accepting his will in place of our own imperfect and faltering plans. Jesus’ yoke and burden are light because he shares them with us. He with whom we have become yokefellows will never permit our burden to become too heavy, nor that we will ever be crushed under its weight. Since he is always near to help, we have the rest of faith in him.

We are not unaware of our enemies—the world, the flesh, and the Devil. When these enemies come in upon us “like a flood,” we would fear and quake before them, and probably fall, but for the realization that greater is he who is for us than all the forces which might be against us.—Isa. 59:19; Rom. 8:31

FUTURE GIFTS PROMISED

Not only have we been made rich by the bountiful gifts of God which now are our privilege to enjoy, but still there are more to follow. These future gifts will result in a fullness of joy quite beyond the ability of our finite minds to comprehend. It will be joint

participation with Christ in the joys which he attained when he was exalted to the presence and right hand of our Heavenly Father. Prophetically, the Master's anticipation of this future joy is described in Psalm 16:11, which reads, "In thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore."

This future gift was first bestowed upon Jesus by promise, and in prayer to his Father he said concerning his disciples, "The glory which thou gavest me I have given them. ... 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 hast given me."—John 17:22,24

After his resurrection and glorification, Jesus confirmed this hope of glory to his church in a series of promises recorded in Revelation, chapters two and three. This glory is so great, and involves so much, that no single symbolism or metaphor is adequate to convey to our minds the "things which God hath prepared for them that love him." (I Cor. 2:9) Indeed, even with the aid of all the illustrations and promises of God concerning our "hope of glory," we still can but partially comprehend, merely viewing them "through a glass, darkly."—Col. 1:27; I Cor. 13:12

Here are some of the promises to the faithful overcomers, those who gain the victory, not in their own strength, but through Christ. "Be thou faithful unto death," Jesus said, "and I will give thee a crown of life." "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna." "He that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations." "I will give him the

morning star.” “The same shall be clothed in white raiment.” “Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God.” “To him ... will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.”—Rev. 2:10,17,26,28; 3:5,12,21

When Jesus was with his disciples, he knew of the Father’s plans for them to be associated with him in the future glory of the kingdom, so he made the promise, “Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” (Luke 12:32) Not only will the Heavenly Father bestow this gift of kingdom glory upon the overcomers, but it will be his “good pleasure” to do so. As we find joy in giving, so it will be a delight to God to give the kingdom to his faithful children. What will this gift of the kingdom mean? To Jesus, the Heavenly Father promised, “I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.” (Ps. 2:8) As we have seen, Jesus promised the overcomers that they also would be given “power over the nations,” adding, “even as I received of my Father.”—Rev. 2:26,27

In another promise to the “little flock,” 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) What a blessed prospect! Think what it will mean to be given the privilege, the authority, and the power to call forth the prisoners of death, and give them the opportunity of inheriting the lost dominion of earth, which was made desolate by sin and its penalty, death.

WHAT WE CAN GIVE

What can we do in return for all of God's gifts so lavishly bestowed upon us? In Proverbs 23:26, the Lord answers, "My son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways." From one standpoint it seems like a very simple thing to give our hearts, our affections, to God. However, that is all we have to give. Our bodies are imperfect and dying, and we could not give that which is under condemnation. All that we possess was given to us by the Lord in the first place.

We have been created with free will, however, and God will not commandeer our heart's desires and affections. He can have them and use them only if we willingly, and out of love, surrender them to him. The invitation, "Give me thine heart," is merely another way of expressing the thought of full surrender to God and the dedicating of ourselves to the doing of his will.

The temporal blessings of life are enjoyed by believers and unbelievers alike, but the spiritual gifts which are so precious to us become ours to enjoy only upon the basis of full surrender to the divine will. To give the Lord our hearts, while it begins with a definite commitment of consecration, requires a lifetime to complete. It means a daily surrendering to him of all that we hold dear. We may give our hearts to God today, and reserve them for ourselves or for others tomorrow. Consecration, however, is a daily laying down, and a daily giving up of our will.

In the foregoing verse, the Lord also says, "Let thine eyes observe my ways." Before we gave our hearts to God, we chose our own ways. We planned

our lives to suit our own best interests. Now, having given our hearts to the Lord, we are to observe his ways, and be guided by them. The Heavenly Father's ways are the ways of love, expressed in giving. He gives us food and clothing. He gives us his Holy Spirit. He gives us discernment. He gives us his Word. He gives us guardian angels. He gives us rest and peace. He gives us promises of coming glory and honor in the kingdom. He supplies all our needs, temporal and spiritual.—Phil. 4:19

The Father's crowning gift is his beloved Son, whom he gave to be the "propitiation [Greek: atonement] for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." (I John 2:1,2) This, and all of God's gifts, are made to those not in a position to repay. Nothing we can give to God would add to what he already possesses, nor by withholding can we make him poor. He gives, not for a reward, but because he loves. This is the great example set before us by the liberality of our God.

This is the way of God which we are bidden by him to observe. It is the way of unselfishness, the way of love. It is a love that impels to give, to lay down, to sacrifice, to serve, to bless, to comfort, and to cheer. It is in the doing of these things that God takes pleasure, and by observing and doing them ourselves we will find our greatest joys, and be most like God.

Paul quoted Jesus as saying, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." (Acts 20:35) It is more blessed because it is being like God. We are richly blessed by God's gifts to us, and by observing and practicing his ways of giving, his gifts become even more precious, because we share them with others.

None of God's gifts to us are meager. They are generous and bountiful, but the joy of receiving them is increased as we share them with those in need. This is particularly true with respect to the knowledge of God's plan which he has given us. If we keep this Truth to ourselves, it may become commonplace and lose its luster of importance. If we share it with others, however, its joy-inspiring power in our lives continually increases.

The world has its special occasions and seasons for giving. The giving that is inspired by these often brings the greatest blessing to the givers. Any occasion which prompts a manifestation of love toward another helps to keep burning the oftentimes low flickering light of love in human hearts. How much happier the world would be if the spirit of love and giving was the mainspring of life every day.

It is so with God. When his great plan of salvation is complete, and the whole world of mankind is fully restored to the sunshine of his love, the people will know that even during the dark night of sin and death God continued to give in order that they might eventually live. They will then know the real purpose of his greatest of all gifts, the gift of his beloved Son. If we observe his ways, we, too, will not limit our giving to any certain day, or days, but every day we will be gladly sharing with others the bounties of God's gifts to us. Thus will we continue to share in the pleasures of our generous and loving Heavenly Father, the source of all good and perfect gifts. ■