

The Gifts of Christmas

Colossians 3:1-17

What are you getting for Christmas? Clothes? Electronics? Toys? Furniture? Jewelry? Hardware? Here's a little advice for you guys: The top five gifts your wife *doesn't* want for Christmas:

5. A case of oil for the car.
4. New outboard motor for the fishing boat.
3. Five year subscription to *Sports Illustrated*.
2. A table saw
1. Three-year membership to Weight Watchers.

Ladies, here's what you should *not* get your husband for Christmas:

5. Any knick-knack.
4. Tickets to the ballet.
3. A Bath and Body Works Soap Basket.
2. A weekend seminar on "Getting in Touch with Your Feelings."
1. A pair of fuzzy bunny slippers.

"It's not the gift that counts!" We've all said that. But one day I saw a woman wearing a red sweatshirt which had across the front in big white letters, "It's not the *thought*, but the *gift* that counts."

On the surface, we might say that's backwards—yet when we are speaking of the gift of Jesus to mankind, it truly is the Gift that counts! God has given us so many riches and gifts at Christmas. When Jesus was born, God gave us a truly wonderful gift—His Son! "*For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son....*" (John 3:16). But included in that Gift of all gifts are so many *other gifts*. They are so much a part of each other that you really can't have one without having all the rest of them. Just listen to a few verses of Scripture:

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8). "*Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!*" (2 Corinthians 9:15). "*He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?"* (Romans 8:32).

You see, God gave us His Son as the very first Christmas Present, but there are so many other things that this involves. Let us consider the Gifts of Christmas:

* * * * *

1 We have been given the Resurrection of Christ, v. 1

The King James Version translates verse one, “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.” The word “if” can also be rightly translated “since,” as it is in many English versions: “*Since you have been raised with Christ...*” not “if”! It is a fact that the person who belongs to Christ has been raised with Christ from the dead in a spiritual sense. And this surely is the most important gift that Jesus could give! Everything else is included in this one. Jesus is able and qualified to give it to us because He Himself has been raised.

In a silver casket behind an iron grill in the Cathedral of St. John in Turin, Italy, lies an ivory-colored cloth with a herringbone twill. It measures fourteen feet, three inches long by three feet, seven inches wide. It is widely believed, both by the millions of visitors who have seen it and by the dozens of scholars and scientists who have studied it, to be the winding sheet used to wrap the body of Jesus after His crucifixion. It is called “The Holy Shroud,” or “The Shroud of Turin.”

Scientists have photographed the shroud very carefully, and then taking the negative of that photograph, one can see very clearly the outline of a male body, with nail prints in his hands and feet and a gaping wound in his side. Scientists have tried to duplicate it, to copy it, but they have not succeeded. Don’t ask me if I believe this really is the burial shroud of our Lord Jesus. It really doesn’t matter to me.

And should it really matter to anybody who has the Spirit of the Risen Christ living within? I don’t think so. Immediately after the Resurrection and the Day of Pentecost, the first Christians didn’t run around with relics and mementos of the occasion: a sleeve from His robe, a thorn from His crown, a chunk of rock from the stone that was rolled away from the tomb, or a piece of the cloth in which his body had been wrapped. Instead, they went forth with the living presence of the Resurrected Christ, and that—and only that—is what made the difference in history!

You and I have been given this same Resurrection. You read the New Testament, particularly Romans and Ephesians, and see if you don’t read the same things I’ve read there: that we have shared in the death of Christ, and we shall certainly share in the Resurrection of Christ. Romans 6:5 reads, “*If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.*”

And this spiritual Resurrection will one day result in a bodily resurrection for all the saints of God, as we read in Romans 8:11, “*And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.*”

We have been given the Resurrection of Christ, and it all became possible on that first Christmas Day so long ago.

2 We have been given the Goals of Christ, vv. 1-2

In verse one Paul tells us to “*set our hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.*” Then in verse two, he continues the thought: “*Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.*” And why? Because **above** is where **Christ** is! Christ is sitting at the right hand of God, and that is where our affections and ambitions and goals are to be focused!

Through Jesus Christ, God has given us a new set of goals and ambitions and aspirations, and all of them are to be oriented toward God. Jesus was not side-tracked with a bunch of earthly ambitions and goals, but set His face steadfastly toward the Cross and the Resurrection and the ascension and the coming glory. And we should not be side-tracked, either.

Paul is saying here in these two verses, “Just as you were so earnestly striving after earthly goals before, now that you have been spiritually raised with Christ, seek after heavenly goals with the same kind of enthusiasm and ambition.”

In Christ we have been given a new set of values, new goals in life. Before I became a Christian, my life’s goal was to become a professional baseball player. I might not have been good enough, but that was my goal. But when Christ saved me, I was given a new set of goals for my life, and that was to be all that God wanted me to be. For some, that may include playing major league baseball, but for me, it involved serving Christ and His people with my life.

But the goal of every Christian should be to be genuinely, completely controlled and filled by Christ. No other goal is important unless and until that goal finds priority in your life. When God sent His Son, to be born as a little baby in a manger in Bethlehem, He was making it possible for you and me to have a new goal in life: becoming like Him!

That sounds fantastic, doesn’t it? It also sounds impossible to the worldly mind. But that is indeed what the Scripture says. Philippians 3:13-14 reads, “*Brothers, I*

do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”

In Christ, I have been given a new goal in life, and that goal is to become Christ-like in everything. Paul said he had “one thing” in life to consider; you and I would do well to narrow all our goals down into one concise statement like that, and it should read that our one goal is to be like Jesus. God has made it possible this Christmas and every day of the year through His Son Jesus Christ.

Several years ago I saw an advertisement by Conoco Oil Company in a magazine. The ad pictured a vine planted in the center of a maze. Time and again that vine had sent out shoots into that maze, looking for a way out, and time and again that vine had been defeated. But it had one goal, and that was to find the sunshine. So the illustration depicted this vine finally weaving around all the obstacles, finding its way out of the maze, stretching itself upward to the light of the sun.

You and I have been set in a maze of sorts—at least it feels like it at times!—and as Christians, our one goal in life is to find the SON! There are so many obstacles and roadblocks which would keep us from being all that God has intended for us to be, but we are not fulfilling our purposes as children of God unless we are earnestly striving toward the goal of finding the SON! *That* is another gift God has made possible for us this Christmas!

3 We have been given the Life of Christ, vv. 3-4

Paul states emphatically in verse three that we are “dead,” that is, dead to sin. We were crucified with Christ. So naturally it follows that any life that we have, must come through Jesus Christ. When God gave His Son Jesus to the world, God was making it possible for all of us to have life in a new and abundant way. That’s what Jesus said: *“I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it to the full”* (John 10:10). Romans 6:23 tells us that while the *“wages of sin is death,”* that the *“gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”* I would call eternal life a pretty good Christmas gift, wouldn’t you?

In verse four of Colossians 3, Paul says very plainly that Christ is our *life*. He means that Christ is our eternal life, and that Christ is the giver of life, but Paul means much more than that. He means also that Christ Himself is the very essence of life, that real, abundant life does not even exist apart from Him. If you are a

born-again child of God, then this is not news to you at all. But let's stop for a moment to remind ourselves of the many times Scripture points this out to us:

John 1:4—*“In him was life, and the life was the light of men.”* John 14:6—*“I am the way, the truth and the life.”* Romans 6:8—*“But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him.”* Romans 6:11—*“So also you must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God through Christ Jesus.”* Galatians 2:20—*“I have crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”* And then finally, 1 John 5:12—*“He who has the Son has life; he who has not the Son of God has not life.”*

Someone has written that Christians “for too long have been in a rut, and the only difference between a rut and a grave is the degree of depth.” In other words, the majority of Christians have not really experienced life as God has intended it. So many times we have settled for less than God's best, God's life that He offers to us and made available to us. There are many people in the world today—and perhaps you are one of them—who would give up all the fancy trappings of a secular Christmas, who would give up all the expensive gifts and colorful packages, just for the sake of experiencing real life. God has given us the opportunity to have life through His Son Jesus Christ. What a gift that is!

4 We have been given the Nature of Christ, vv. 10-12

In the light of the fact that we now have the resurrection of Christ, that our goals are the goals of Christ, and that the very life of Christ indwells our beings, Paul now turns to something new—something radical. Those things in themselves would be truly wonderful gifts for anyone to receive at Christmas or any other time of year, but the gift is not complete.

So in verses 5-9 Paul lists a few things that should not be a part of our lives if we are in fact filled with Christ. They belong to the old nature we had before we were saved by Jesus: *“sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry...anger, rage, malice, slander and filthy language from your lips....”* In verse nine Paul says that we have put off the old nature with its practices, just like you'd take off a coat or a suit of clothes.

Then in verse ten, Paul says that we are to put on the new nature. And where does that new nature come from? It comes from God through Christ! Verse ten tells us something very wonderful about this new nature, that it *“is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.”* Beginning in verse twelve we are told the

characteristics of this new nature: “*compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.*” We are told that we are to put on love; that the peace of Christ should rule in our hearts, that the Word of God should dwell in us richly; that everything we do should be done in the power of the Name of the Lord Jesus.

Here’s what it boils down to: We can reform ourselves. We can stop a particular bad habit. We can make New Year’s resolutions. We can make a lot of promises. But unless we have a new nature inside us, it will all be for nothing in the long run. The person inside me must die before Jesus can take His rightful place on the throne of my heart.

David prayed to God when he needed a new nature: “*Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me*” (Psalm 51:10). Paul put it this way for the Christians at Corinth: “*Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old man has passed away, behold the new has come*” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Having this new nature of Christ will mean one thing: it will mean that daily we are being molded and shaped and conformed to the image of Christ. We are becoming more and more like Jesus every day. Who else but God could make possible something that wonderful and exciting! And yet God has done it through the gift of His Son.

Listen to these verses: 2 Corinthians 3:18—“*And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, **are being changed into his likeness** from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.*” Romans 8:28-29—“*We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined **to be conformed to the image of his Son**, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren.*” And then 1 John 3:2—“*Beloved, we are God’s children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears **we shall be like him**, for we shall see him as he is.*”

And what a gift that is! That we, sinful and weak and finite, should be given new natures is almost too much to comprehend. Our old natures aren’t just patched up! God gives us new ones, through His Son Jesus Christ which He *gave* us at the very first Christmas.

Those are the gifts of Christmas: the Resurrection of Christ, the Goals of Christ, the Life of Christ, and the Nature of Christ.

What kind of wrapping paper did God use? *“And this shall be a sign unto you: Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger”* (Luke 2:12).

What kind of ribbon did God use? *“And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace toward men of good will”* Luke 2:13-14).

And every gift needs a gift tag: *“For unto **YOU** is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord”* Luke 2:11)

Have you received the gifts of Christmas?