

In a World of Gift-Giving – 2 Cor 9:10-15

Introduction – In this strange world, we find ourselves between two important shopping days: Black Friday and Cyber Monday. It is also the first Sunday of Advent and the beginning of the church year. The unbelieving world around us is aiming at Christmas and so we wonder if we should be. What does it mean to “put Christ back into Christmas?” Should we stop the practice or the emphasis of gift-giving? Certainly the meaning of Christmas is much more than getting presents. But in another sense, central to Christmas is the idea of a gift (John 3:16, 2 Cor 9:15).

The Opportunity to Give – In 2 Corinthians 8-9, Paul is exhorting and directing the Corinthians about a charity work to relieve the poor saints in Jerusalem and Judea and to follow the good example of the churches in Macedonia who freely gave out of their own poverty. Corinth had made a pledge and Paul has sent Titus to make sure that they follow through, collecting that pledge before he comes, lest his boasting of them prove vain. Their giving is to be out of generosity “*and not as a grudging obligation*” (9:5). Their gift is to be given freely and cheerfully (v7). And it is to be given liberally, that is, with extravagance – a bit over the top (v6). This reflects the nature of God who gives that we may have an abundance (vv8-9). We give because we have been given, knowing we will receive, in order that we might give again.

The World in Which We Live – We live in a world made by God that is constantly giving in such a way that we are to learn to be great givers. He supplies seed to the sower, the farmer “gives” that seed to the ground and the ground multiplies that gift and returns in abundance (v10). God is into this kind of multiplication (Luke 6:38). The result is a bounty that leads to generosity which results in thanksgiving (v11). It provides for the needs of the saints and brings thanksgiving to God (v12). When we witness the generosity of other believers, we glorify God (v13) and we pray for more of God’s grace expectantly (v14). This is all informed by the indescribably gift of God (v15)

How God Views Gift-Giving – It is easy to become cynical about gift-giving. But much of this is tied to not learning the art of giving and receiving from God. God hates greed and envy, but He isn’t a fan of miserliness either. As we see in this passage, the world is made to give and to give abundantly. Fathers naturally give good gifts to their children (Matt 7:11) and this is in a passage on prayer teaching that the heavenly Father loves to give in answer to prayer. In fact, the illustration proves God will not be outdone in kindness, in mercy, in doing good to others (see also Psalm 81:10, Mic 7:18). Jesus intimated that He was just waiting to give living water to the woman at the well (John 4:10). God exhorts those who give to do so with liberality (Rom 12:8), and the story of the Prodigal Son is really about a Prodigal Father who is prodigal in his celebration over his returned son (Luke 15).

The Prodigal Father – Gift is the very nature of the Gospel. The free gift of salvation through the second Adam is far greater than the offense of the first Man (Rom 5:15-18). This means that the work of the evangelization of the world is the work of a gift. Salvation is all the gift of God (Eph 2:8) and even your faith is His gift (Eph 2:9). When Christ ascended, He led captivity captive “*and gave gifts to men*” (Eph 4:7-8). He was exalted to the right hand of God “*to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins*” (Acts 5:31). Jesus says that He would give His flesh “*for the life of the world*” (John 6:51). “*I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep*” (John 10:11).

Gifts at Christmas – First, we must remember that we are not required to celebrate Christmas as a particular day of the year – this is simply a tradition. Secondly, even if we do, the only gift-giving we find in the Scripture surrounding the Incarnation are gifts given to Jesus (Matt 2:11). It is possible to let the holiday become nothing more than an excuse for greed, envy and a lack of self-control. And it frequently is just that – but that is not because of the gifts.

Every Good Gift (James 1:17) – Instead, let us view every gift-giving opportunity anchored in the fact that God gave to us – and that what He gave to us He gave beyond our ability to calculate or understand – and He continues to do so (Rom 8:32). We give because He first gave, just as we love because He first loved (1 John 4:19). Remember, Jesus said that we treat Him through our treatment of others (Matt 25:40). Christmas traditions become an opportunity to become more like God, ministering the gifts God has given to us as good stewards (1 Pet 4:10) and sharing from the riches we have been given (1 Tim 6:17-18). Left to ourselves, we become too tight-fisted and so we need occasions, like Christmas, to put on the training wheels of gift-giving and the generous wisdom of God.

With each present you give, and with each gift you open, remember where this all comes from and who we are imitating. “*Thanks be to God for His indescribably gift!*”