

The Great Gift Exchange

Thomas Robinson, November 25, 2012

James 1:17-18

¹⁷ Every **good gift** and every **perfect gift** is from above, coming down from **the Father of lights** with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. ¹⁸ **Of his own will he brought us forth** by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

Matthew 7:7-11

⁷ “**Ask**, and it will be given to you; **seek**, and you will find; **knock**, and it will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. ⁹ Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? ¹¹ If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, **how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!**”

John 3:16

¹⁶ For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Acts 17:24-25

Acts 17:24 The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, ²⁵ nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since **he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.**

Psalms 8:3-9

³ When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, ⁴ what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? ⁵ Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. ⁶ **You have given him dominion over the works of your hands;** you have put all things under his feet, ⁷ all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, ⁸ the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas. ⁹ O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Psalms 16:11

¹¹ You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Ephesians 5:1-2

¹ Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. ² And walk in love, as **Christ loved us and gave himself up for us**, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Between Black Friday and the Christmas Tree

We've just survived Thanksgiving. The parade of Santa Claus and Macy's. Flowing into "Black Friday" – a new American holiday when retailers sell so much that they're "in the black." The concept has grown steadily since 2000; this year Walmart opened 8 pm Thursday. People flood into stores. We await sales figures as a sign of the health of the economy.

Why? Many reasons. We want deals. But we buy Christmas presents. Gifts for each other. But what is this Gift-giving? Where does this powerful desire come from? We all know that gift-giving has been commercialized, commoditized, etc. Look up Advent Conspiracy: "worship fully, spend less, give more, love all" – turn Christmas upside down.

Still, giving gifts has deep roots. Yes, it's easily corrupted and misused, but the idea is deeply spiritual and runs through the Bible. Jesus was sensitive to the misuse of giving because it creates a cynical and suspicious attitude about the heart of what he was about. Gifts for pious show, to create obligation, to pay for performance, etc. "You better watch out, you better not cry ... Santa Claus is coming to town."

Advent is coming. We want to explore the Great Gift Exchange that God calls us into.

Every Good Gift

A most basic element of God's character is that he loves so that he gives. "For God so loved the world that he gave..." James says every genuinely good act of giving (*dosis*) and every perfect, unbroken gift (*dorema*) originates with God. (Many of our gifts are compromised or broken. We see it in others) This is God's unchanging, steady character, seen in our very existence, a special part of a great gift of creation, knowing the giver.

What is a gift? An expression of the will, heart, mind of the giver that says something about the receiver as well. God shows who he is and what he thinks of his creatures through his gifts: Life, breath, everything. He gives responsible dominion over creation.

God knows what we need and wants us to experience life to its full. "At your right hand are pleasures forevermore." Seek God's kingdom and righteousness and all else is yours.

Jesus urges his disciples to think of God as giver in order to properly know themselves.

Boldly ask, seek, knock. Every real request is a recognition of God as the source of all.

Knowing God as the giver of gifts on the most basic and comprehensive level of creator, prepares us to know him as the loving giver revealed in Jesus. Good, perfect gift.

In Phil 2:5-11 we explored the Hymn of the Self-Giving God. A God who might have turned inward, but refused. Emptied himself to become like us. He gave himself as servant, taking our brokenness, our suffering, our death – even death on a cross. Jesus is exalted with the very name of God. That complete gift of self is who God is.

Imitating the Giver

Understanding the great gift exchange goes to the very heart of our relationship with God, to Grace. We have nothing to give God except what he's given us. But that is enough.

There can be no payment, obligation. But there can be learning, imitation, love, delight.

God is the self-less giver who calls us to know the joy of self-giving love. Love even for enemies. Delight in serving friends. Learning to walk in love as Christ loved us ...