

Christmas Day 2014

The Perfect Gift

1 John 4:9–10

In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. ¹⁰In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.



By now, all our Christmas gift buying is over, probably so is the exchanging and even the opening and unwrapping. After spending so many hours trying to select the right gift for the right person, all that remains are the few moments we spent opening and admiring the gifts given and received.

As Christians, of course, we've been speaking about Christ Jesus, the Babe of Bethlehem, being the greatest gift, the perfect gift. That's what the angels told us last night: "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger" (Lk 2:11–12). Christ Jesus is the original Christmas gift, God's gift to us. And He is the perfect Christmas gift! After all, the idea and tradition of giving and receiving gifts and presents is in response to God giving us His gift. Yes He is the perfect Christmas gift, for He is perfect. And on this Christmas Day I would like to invite you to meditate on this truth that in Him we have our perfect gift.

I. Four characteristics are necessary to be the perfect gift.

Since gifts play such an important part in our Christmas celebration, and we certainly want to receive a perfect gift, and for that to happen we do think on the perfect gifts as well, as we buy or acquire that gift. But how do we decide on the perfect gift?

I think there are at least four requirements for a gift to be perfect which we need to consider:

First, to be perfect, a gift must come from the right motive, and the right motive must be love. True love enjoys expressing itself in gifts. The perfect gift cannot be given out of a selfish motive that gives for what it can receive in return. We've probably all given a few gifts like that—to win her favor, to impress him. The perfect gift has to be different. It must be given out of love that sacrifices of itself in order to give.

Second, the perfect gift must be expensive—but not necessarily in dollars and cents. The perfect gift can't be holding anything back, giving less than the giver's best. And that's often not a matter of money. A child's gift to his mother or father, for example, on which he's spent many hours of work to make perfect, may not be expensive in money, but he's invested so much of himself in it. To his mom or dad, it's the most precious gift she or he will receive this Christmas.

Third, the perfect gift must have a purpose: it must be useful. That's to say, it isn't about what the giver wants—it's what will really serve the person receiving it. You wouldn't think of giving a bicycle to a child who is physically handicapped. However, if you could give that same child the ability to walk again, that would truly be a useful gift. It might be perfect.

Fourth, the perfect gift might be durable. I say might be durable because, many of the gifts you give and will receive might meet the first three requirements for a perfect

gift, but all our gifts lack one thing: durability. The homemade gift from your child will eventually become useless; Johnnie's toy fire engine will, before long, be a pile of broken pieces; his father's new shirt will become frayed at the collar. In fact, all the gifts that the world has to offer have only temporary value.

II. How does God's gift to us measure up to those four characteristics?

Since no perfect gift can come from the world, let's see if the gift from God about which our text speaks will meet the requirements of the perfect gift.

First of all, is it perfect as to the motive by which it was given? Our text from the apostle John says, "In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 Jn 4:9–10).

What prompted God to give us this gift? It was not selfishness, for what could God gain? He would receive nothing in return. In fact, man by nature has, over and over again, spit in God's face with his sins. God loved us when we deserved his anger, when we were dirty, repulsive, and hateful because of our sin. God revealed his love when he sent his only Son into the world.

But his love does not stop with us. His love is universal. God holds out his gift to all people—not to those whose behavior might merit a gift, for no man ever deserved this gift. Therefore, if Satan would tempt you to doubt God's love for you, just look at yourself, and then to the manger and the cross. If you are a part of this world, God's gift of love is for you. God's gift truly comes from the perfect motive: the love of God toward us.

The second quality of a perfect gift is that it must be expensive. Is the gift of which our text speaks expensive? God has only one Child, and yet he sacrificed him for everyone. He could have sent a great hero to save the world from war and poverty and political oppression perhaps, and that would, indeed, have been expensive. Much more, though, he sent his only Son, part of his very essence, someone very dear to him.

What's more yet, he could have sent his Son as a great king with riches and robes and servants. Instead, he sent him to a humble beginning: born without a human father to a foster father who was a poor carpenter, born in a dirty stable with a food trough for a bed, a lowly Servant of servants.

Still, God paid even more. He sent his Son to the worst life. He knew he would bear the sins of all people, that he would be laughed at, spit upon, mocked, and cursed. God knew his Son would sweat blood, bear the agony of the lash and thorns, and finally die a horrible death on the cross. Would anyone dare to set the price for such a gift? Perfect, then, is God's gift as to its cost.

But, most important, is the third requirement, for the perfect gift must have a purpose. It doesn't matter how much love is behind the bike or how costly it is. The child who can never ride it still sees it only as useless. What purpose does our text say that God's gift has? Our text says, "In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him" (1 Jn 4:9).

The perfect gift to give dying men! Sin kills. God told Adam and Eve before they'd first sinned, "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Gen 2:17). Death is in store for

everyone, because everyone is born a sinner and, by nature, sins. We've all given to God and to those dear to us less than our best, gifts that held back, were anything but perfect. The price we pay for our sinfulness is death: "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 6:23).

Death, in its fullest meaning, is not just the end of our earthly existence. It is eternal death and separation from God. But thank God that no sooner had sin entered the world than God promised a Savior. Christ has made us free from death by washing away our sins through his life and death on our behalf. Our most imperfect giving to God and to our neighbor, our selfishness and greed to receive rather than to give, have been forgiven. Christ himself describes the purpose of his coming: "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly" (Jn 10:10).

And what about the fourth requirement of a perfect gift, durability? Again, we are reminded: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16). Eternal life! Life everlasting!

God saw the need and, in love, sent the perfect gift for the highest purpose. As children crippled by sin, God gave us the perfect gift: the ability to walk with him into eternal life.

This gift lacks no durability. Jesus says, "And, behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Mt 28:20). And again, "I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand" (Jn 10:28). Christ Jesus himself and all that he brought with him from heaven to Bethlehem to us are indeed gifts of God forever.

III. Oh, and a perfect gift has to have one more characteristic too.

So there you have it—the perfect gift. Maybe there is one more requirement that we need to keep in mind. For a gift to be perfect, it has to be possible for you actually to have it. You have it? Well, only if it's given. The perfect gift does actually have to be given.

At Christmas, God actually gave you Christ. On the cross, God actually gave his Son into death. But now, even to this day, he continues to give him, Christ Jesus, with all his blessings, to you. That, really, is why we're here today. In this very word of Christ's birth, life, death, and resurrection, you are being given, right now, Christ himself. Here is the gift. Hear the gift.

Yes, hear the gift: "In the name of Jesus, I forgive you all your sins." Gift of forgiveness given. Hear the gift: "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Gift of membership in Jesus' family given. Hear the gift: "This is my body. This is my blood." Gift of eternal life in and with Jesus given. The perfect gift. Given again right here.

Hear the Gift saying, "And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matt. 28:20)

As you enjoy the giving and receiving of gifts this Christmas season, may you also be more aware of the precious gift God has given to you in his Son, Jesus.

Let us remember God's call also to us to give that priceless gift to all around us, proclaiming the joy the gift has brought to us, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Pet 2:9).

God gave the perfect gift, Christ Jesus. Now this Christmas, give the perfect gift! Let your gift be your witness of Christ, the gift of eternal life, so others may also enjoy the many blessings of that perfect gift. Amen.