

Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!

Second Corinthians 9:15

Every year an outfit called PNC Financial Services Group calculates how much it would cost to give the gifts named in the classic Christmas song, *The Twelve Days of Christmas*. According to *The Huffington Post*,

The price of partridges, pear trees and turtle doves has spiked, pushing the cost of every item mentioned in the carol "The Twelve Days of Christmas" above \$100,000 for the first time.

- The partridge is still the cheapest item, at \$15.00.
- Eleven pipers piping will set you back \$2,427.00, but that's a relative bargain compared to seven swans-a-swimming, which cost \$6,300.00. That's a 12.5% rise over last year.
- Pipers piping and drummers drumming rose 3%.
- Six items didn't go up in cost this year: French hens, calling birds, gold rings, maids-a-milking, ladies dancing and lords-a-leaping.
- Five gold rings actually declined a bit, down \$5.00 to \$645.00, from \$650.00 last year

Luxury retailer Neiman Marcus unveiled what its *Christmas Fantasy! Gifts*. On this year's list:

- Dancing Fountains for your home. The company behind some of the worlds most famous fountains, like the Bellagio resort in Las Vegas, will bring its magic to your home for \$1million.
- If that seems a little unrealistic, you can reserve your Ferrari FF for a mere \$395,000.00. It might sound like a lot for a car but in the description they mention it has a "class-leading 16 cubic feet of trunk space."
- Still too expensive? You can get a table tennis table specially designed by artist Tom Burr. It's a limited edition sculpted entirely from black rubber. It's \$45,000.00.

When we start talking about gifts we can feel materialistic or that Christmas has become too commercialized.

Gift-giving and gift-receiving are not in themselves materialistic. It isn't necessarily the result of crass commercialism.

Gift-giving and gift-receiving are at the heart of Christmas. It is Christmas precisely because God **gave** us Jesus Christ.

The God of the Bible is a lavish and extravagant gift-giver. The apostle James said of God,

James 1:17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.

When James used "gift" the first time he meant the act of giving. When he used "gift" the second time he meant the gift itself.

- God's acts of giving are qualified by the word "good." It describes the nature of the giver as lavish in generosity.
- The gifts themselves are qualified by the word "perfect." It is a description of the extravagant value of the gifts.

A paraphrase of what James said would be, "God lavishly gives extravagant gifts." *I like that!*

You know, of course, that the title, 'Christian,' means *like-Christ*. Thus, if I am to be like God, I will lavishly give extravagant gifts.

Let's look at some other mentions of God and His gifts. When Jesus was talking to the woman at the well, He said to her,

John 4:10 ..."If you knew the **gift** of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water."

The "gift of God" Jesus had in mind is what we call salvation. It is eternal life with Him in Heaven.

Salvation is described as God's gift in many passages. Here is another example:

Ephesians 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,

I'd say salvation, which cannot be earned or merited but must be given by grace, is **both** lavish and extravagant!

The giving doesn't stop with salvation. God keeps on giving gifts to you even after you are saved.

Jesus told His saved followers to wait in Jerusalem until they received what He called "the promise of the Father." They were already saved and had the Holy Spirit indwelling them. He was referring to the Holy Spirit Who would shortly come upon them to empower them to be His witnesses.

On the Day of Pentecost the apostle Peter described the coming of the Holy Spirit as God's gift to those who believed:

Acts 2:38 Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

God's giving doesn't stop with salvation. It doesn't stop with the Holy Spirit coming upon you. The supernatural abilities by which we may minister to one another are also called gifts. They are the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Every Christian is given at least one.

We proclaim that God is by nature a good and perfect gift-giver. There is therefore nothing inherently wrong with gift-giving or gift-receiving. Further, His gifts are extraordinary.

With that as our perspective I want to take a look at one of the great statements in the Bible about God and gift-giving. In a section of the Bible that is discussing the principles of giving to the Lord to His church from out of our personal finances, the apostle Paul suddenly breaks out with the following exclamation:

2 Corinthians 9:15 Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!

“Indescribable” is a unique word. It is used only here in all the New Testament. Commentators struggle to define it. They use words like *incapable of being adequately expressed or uttered, unspeakable, inexpressible, and unutterable.*

It’s the kind of gift that takes your breath away, that cannot begin to be expressed in words at all. But it isn’t just the gift; it’s the motivation behind it, the love that gives birth to it.

Maybe an illustration will help. It’s Christmas and (hopefully) one of your traditions is to read a story or two. You might consider the classic by O. Henry, *The Gift of the Magi.*

Of course I’m going to spoil it for you right now!

Della and Jim Young, the main characters, are a newly married couple with very little money. Jim has suffered a thirty-percent pay cut and the two must scrimp for everything. On the day before Christmas Della counts the money she has painstakingly saved for months. She is dismayed to find she has less than two dollars, hardly enough to buy anything at all. After a good long cry Della determines to find a way to buy Jim the present he deserves.

Jim and Della have two possessions of which they are both proud. One is Jim's gold watch which has been handed down from his grandfather. The other is Della's long hair, lustrous, shining, and falling past her knees.

Before she can lose her nerve, Della races out of their apartment to a wigmaker to whom she sells her beautiful hair for twenty dollars. With the money in her hand Della goes to the stores trying to find something worthy of Jim. At last she finds a beautiful fob for Jim’s prize watch.

Meanwhile Jim has sold his beautiful gold watch to buy Della her gift. Her gift is a set of beautiful combs for her lovely hair.

The story does a good job of putting their gifts into perspective. It wasn’t the watch fob, or the combs, that were the gifts. It was the surrender of

that which was dearest to each in order to give to the other. In the end they both received the experience of an indescribable gift.

I don't know if you will receive a gift from anyone this year that is in the category of combs when you've sold your hair, or a watch fob when you've sold your watch.

But you have, or you can, receive just such gifts from the Creator of Heaven and Earth.

Jesus Christ... Salvation by grace through faith in Him... The coming into us and upon us of God the Holy Spirit... The supernatural abilities of the Holy Spirit by which we serve one another. These are all part of God's indescribable gift to us.

If you exchange gifts for Christmas, you first have to receive them and then open them.

It's the same with God's indescribable gift of Jesus. You must receive Him; you must open your heart to Him.

Have you left an unopened gift under the tree?

If you gave a loved one a Christmas gift and they never opened it, you would be disappointed. And it would be a worthless gift because they don't receive the benefit of a gift never opened.

Year-after-year many people for whom Jesus Christ died to save leave His indescribable gift unopened. It's really as simply as that!

I'll tell you who never would leave an unopened Christmas gift, and that is a child. That package intrigues them, it excites them. It's no wonder God tells us to have a child-like faith in receiving His salvation.

Last night at dinner the littlest Gene (he's about 19 months) said the prayer. We bowed our heads and he said, "Jesus... Amen!"

What about all the stuff in-between???

Really it's the most profound prayer I've ever heard! "Amen" means something like *so be it*. It's a word of affirmation. In a very real sense Jesus is everything. Amen.

Don't let another Christmas pass without receiving the greatest gift of all. We've packaged it with song and video and story telling and preaching. But at the heart of it is God the Son, dying for your sins, rising again from the dead, poised to return to resurrect and rapture the church ahead of a great Tribulation that is coming upon planet earth.

Receive Him.

