

THE BEREANS

ACTS 17:11

Matthew 1:21-23

Lesson #68

The Great Christmas Gift

12/23/2018

What is your theology of gift giving at Christmas?



1

The Uniqueness of Christianity

- Jesus' uniqueness did not rest on his **ethical teaching, philosophical wisdom, or political power.**
- Jesus' was not the only figure in history claiming to be **divine, messiah, or a miracle worker.**

Jesus was unique in that:

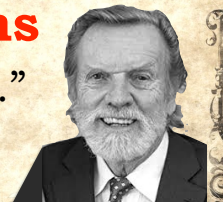
- He came for the **purpose of dying.**
His death and resurrection addressed the core of the human dilemma - **death.**
- He came also to show us (in his birth) **something about a God / man relationship.**



2

"The greatest challenge of our age is not emerging technology or climate change but understanding **what it means to be human.**"

John Naisbitt



3

Matthew 1

"21 She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for it is he who will save His people from their sins."

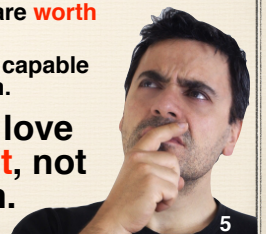
22 Now all this took place that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying,

23 "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name **Immanuel,** which translated means, **"God with us."** (Isaiah 7:14)

4

Immanuel - God with us

- Of all the ways God could reveal Himself to humanity this had to be the most **shocking.**
Other religions pictured God as **remote and powerful.**
Jesus enters history at the **"low end" of the cultural food chain** - a vulnerable baby, powerless, among us (not over us or apart from us).
- This not only reveals the heart of God but also the **dignity of humanity.**
We cannot save ourselves but we are **worth saving** and at a great cost.
We are made in the image of God - capable of a **personal relationship** with Him.
- God courts our faith and love with **freedom and respect**, not control and manipulation.



5

God reveals Himself not as a controlling master but as **IMMANUEL** (one with us);

inviting an authentic personal relationship.



6

Ephesians 6



“²³ **Peace** be to the brethren, and **love** with **faith**, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

²⁴ **Grace** be with all those who **love** our Lord Jesus Christ with a love incorruptible.”

*What is the relationship between “**grace**”, “**peace**”, “**love**”, and “**faith**”?*

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Ephesians

Who we are in Christ ch. 1-3	How we should live ch. 4-6
<p>God's gift “in Christ”</p> <p>Grace Peace</p> 	<p>Man's response</p> <p>Faith Love</p> 

8

Faith and Love (agape)

- are not (primarily) feelings but commitments (**choices WE make**).
- are not only nouns but verbs (**actions WE take**).
- are not gifts to some but endowments to all (**because we are all made in the image of God**).
- Why we love and believe the way we do is complex and involves some factors beyond our control (including God).

But not without OUR free response at some meaningful level.

The issue is not being “smitten with” faith or “falling in” love.

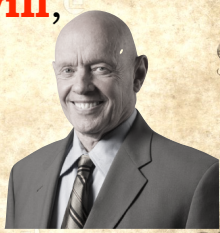
The real challenge is - **how do WE direct** our love and trust?



9

“Every human has four endowments - self awareness, conscience, **independent will**, and creative imagination.”

Stephen Covey



10

BUT is not Saving Faith a gift from God?

Two lines of evidence argue that it is.

1. It is a logical deduction from a view of **God's sovereignty**, which demands that:

- Salvation by grace through faith demands that God control **each step** of the process.
- **Regeneration precedes** Faith and Justification.
- If **Faith precedes** Regeneration, then salvation is not of grace because man contributes to it.

11

“If one single molecule in the universe is outside God’s sovereign control, nothing can be assured.”

R.C. Sproul



12

BUT is not Saving Faith a gift from God?

Two lines of evidence argue that it is.

1. It is a logical deduction from a view of **God’s sovereignty**.
2. Some **Scriptures** are sighted in support of saving faith as a gift.

Ephesians 2

“8 For by grace you have been saved through **faith**; and that not of yourselves, it is the **gift of God**; 9 not as a result of works, that no one should boast.”

13

Is faith a gift of God?

Ephesians 2:8

“For by grace you have been saved through **faith**; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;”

Neuter

Feminine

“Grace is God’s part, faith ours.”
“That” refers to the act of being saved by grace conditioned on our faith.”

A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Vol.IV, p.525

John Calvin (unlike many of his followers) did not use this text to support his view that faith was a gift from God.

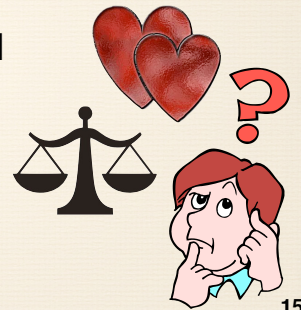
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Faith and love are foundational to personal relationships.

Saving faith is pictured in Scripture as a free (not dictated) response.

Authentic personal relationships demand free interaction.

If there is no real freedom can there be any real meaning to love, ethics, and justice?



15

- Why did Christ bother to persuade the non-elect? He would certainly know who was elect (Jn.10:14 “I know my own and they know me.”)
- Why should Paul bother to use persuasion at all? (Acts 17:3-4,17; 18:4; 19:8-9). Note that in Acts 14:1 the Apostles “spoke in such a manner that a great multitude believed.”
- Why did Christ marvel at unbelief?
- How can unbelief be justly judged?
- How can we explain degrees of unbelief being judged more severely?

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- How can demonic activity hinder a direct work of the Spirit? Lk.8:12; 2 Cor.4:4.
- Why are some classes of people harder to win than others? Titus 1:12-13
- Why does God “give the gift of faith” to so many Americans and to so few Libyans, Mongolians, Tibetans, Afghans, Tunisians, Turks, etc?
- In Scripture, faith is ascribed to man, not God. Lk. 7:50 “Your faith has saved you”, Matt.9:22 “Your faith has made you well”, Matt.9:28-29 “it shall be done to you according to your faith.”

17

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as a controlling master
but as **IMMANUEL**
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18

The Great Christmas gift

- Human **dignity** is affirmed in the dramatic act of the incarnation.
- The relationship between God and man is affirmed as an authentic **interaction**.
- Faith and love are **attributes** of bearing God's image.
- Faith is a **response** to the Gospel, not a meritorious work.



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**What is your theology of
gift giving at Christmas?**



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