

### The Perfect Gift

Every Thanksgiving, my family chooses names of what family member we are going to buy for during our Christmas gift exchange, then we spend the next month searching frantically for that perfect gift. I am ashamed to say that at times I've gotten so caught up in the gift-giving that I've lost perspective. Parading from store to store trying to think of what to get this or that person, the true spirit of Christmas is often lost in our search for the perfect gift that will not disappoint, but there is one gift that never disappoints. That is "the gift of God," and even if you don't believe, I hope you will take just a moment to contemplate this gift.

### The Diagnosis

Imagine that a doctor offers to give you an operation for free. You might say, "I have no need for surgery." However, if you were later diagnosed with a cancerous tumor that required surgery, you would then see the value of the gift. Similarly, the gift of God often goes unappreciated because we do not see the value of the gift. For this reason, it is important to contemplate our condition, which is really no secret to any of us. Whether you believe in God or not, you can surely admit what the Bible plainly states, that "all have sinned" (Rom. 3:23). While we may flatter ourselves that we are basically good, all of us can certainly admit that we are far from perfect. That's why the Bible says, "there is none righteous, no, not one" (Rom. 3:10). Most of us will not deny this. The Bible tells us why we are in this condition. It says this is because we are all born with a sinful nature. That is why David says, "in sin my mother conceived me" (Ps. 51:5). We are all born with desires and temptations, which lead us to sometimes do things that we know are bad for us. That is why the Bible says we have all sinned, and all of us are sinners.

### The Sentence

Since all have sinned, all deserve to die. At least, this is what the Bible claims. It says, "the

wages of sin is death" (Rom. 3:23). Wages are the payment. That means, when we sin, we deserve to die. But why? Many people wonder why God makes such a big deal about a few little sins. What most of us don't realize is that one little sin is like one little malignant cancer cell. It is deadly. While little white lies may seem innocent and harmless, all sin corrupts and destroys our character. That is why the Bible says, "sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death" (Jas. 1:15). Baby sins are like baby lions. They may seem cute when they are little, but they do not stay little. They always grow, and when they are full-grown, they are deadly. Still, many people think sin is something that they can just play with and then let go whenever they feel like it, but as much as we like to think that we control sin, it is really controlling us. It's like the story of the man who had a pet lion. He raised the lion, trained it, and it seemed friendly. For years he seemed to have the lion under control until one day, the lion just suddenly attacked and killed him. That's how sin is. It is deadly.

### The Great Exchange

While the Bible says, "the wages of sin is death," many think that even if God does exist, He will simply forgive them and let them into heaven because they are basically good. I have often asked people, "If you were standing at the gate of heaven and God was standing in front of you asking, 'Why should I let you into heaven,' what would you say?" The most common response is, "I'm basically good." Most people seem to think that God will let them into heaven on the basis of their good works, not realizing how offensive this is to God. What we don't seem to realize is that our sin killed Jesus. You see, one single sin is like one little malignant cancer cell in the brain. It is deadly, and unless some way is found to remove it, it will kill you. Fortunately, God has offered a way to rescue you. He came to earth to take your sinful mind and die your death so He could give you His sinless mind. That's why the Bible says, "Let this mind be in you

which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5). This is the greatest gift exchange ever!

### The Free Gift

Still, as amazing as this offer is, many refuse to take advantage of it. Some feel it is too hard to give up their sins, some are afraid that they will miss their sins, and some feel they are not good enough, but the good news is, salvation is a "free gift" (Rom. 5:15). That is why we are told, "whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely" (Rev. 22:17). The fact is, it is offensive to try and pay for a free gift, especially when your offense is so great. According to the Bible, our sins killed Jesus. Trying to make up for our sins by good deeds would be like killing a child and then trying to make it up to their parents by doing something. The fact is, nothing could pay off what you did. Their only hope would be for the parent to forgive freely. And that's our only hope. Fortunately, that is what God offers. He says anyone who is willing to come to Him and ask for forgiveness, then invite Jesus into their heart, can freely receive the gift of eternal life. That means, don't worry about how hard it is to give up your sins, how much you will miss your sins, or how unworthy you are. Just come to Jesus as you are, sins and all, and let Him change you.

### The Gift that Keeps Giving

While many try to pay for the free gift of eternal life, there is nothing we can do to earn it. We can only accept it. Trying to get good enough for God is like trying to get strong enough to pick up a house. Overcoming sin on our own is impossible. That is why we must cry out to Jesus, "Please rescue me from my sins!" When we do this, Jesus comes inside us and gives us the power to overcome our sins. You see, those who try to give up their sins so they can get good enough for Jesus are working backward and will eventually fail. Jesus said, "without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5), but when we ask Jesus into our heart, praying for help, He will come into our lives and provide power to our efforts. That's why Jesus says, "with God all things are possible" (Matt.

19:26). When you ask Jesus into your heart, you can "work out your own salvation" because "it is God who works in you" (Phil. 2:12, 13). While sin is killing us, God offers us the power to overcome sin. That's why the Bible says, "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17). God empowers us to save us.

#### The Season of Giving

Have you at times felt post-Christmas regret, lamenting, "I should have gotten that gift!" Sadly, Christmas passed, and the window of opportunity was over. Similarly, many are about to miss out on the opportunity of a lifetime, and the regret will be horrible. This life is our opportunity to overcome sin while Jesus offers His power. You don't have to get good enough. You don't have to give up this or that sin first. You don't have to feel strong emotions or have great faith. You simply have to have enough faith to come to Jesus, and He will give you the gift. He will empower you. He will change you. All you have to do is come. Jesus says, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). Aren't you tired of searching for that perfect gift? Aren't you tired of laboring for the things of this world that never truly satisfy? Wouldn't you like to receive a gift that keeps giving? The Bible says, "Come." Jesus died to pay your penalty. Don't let His death be in vain for you. He appeals, "let him who thirsts come. And whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely" (Rev. 22:17).

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