

Gifts, Bribes and Guilt Offerings

by Anton Bosch

The sermon emphasizes the importance of genuine self-giving in the context of Christmas and critiques the commercialization of gift-giving.

Scripture: John 3:16, Romans 12:1, 2 Corinthians 8:5, Titus 2:13, 1 John 3:16

Topics: "Christmas", "Stewardship"

Description

Anton Bosch addresses the commercialization and materialism that have overshadowed the true meaning of Christmas, emphasizing the need to refocus on God's greatest gift - His Son, Jesus. He highlights how the act of giving gifts has been distorted by greed and the pressure to outdo others, leading to a lack of genuine love and devotion in relationships. Bosch stresses the importance of giving ourselves first to the Lord before giving to others, pointing out that true giving stems from love rather than guilt or obligation.

Transcript

This is the time of year that people are scurrying around to buy, wrap and mail gifts to friends and family. It seems like an innocent and nice enough tradition, especially when we use it to remind one another of God's greatest gift - His Son.

But unfortunately the reasons for giving becomes obscured and even distorted in the frenzy of finding that perfect tie, scarf or motor car. Yes, here in California a number of auto manufacturers are encouraging folk to give a new car for Christmas! The fact that some have not yet paid off the debt they incurred last Christmas makes the whole commercialization even more of a travesty. (The debt of the new car could hang around your neck for the next eight Christmases.)

How can such a seemingly excellent and sacrificial practice have been high-jacked by the gods of money, greed and materialism? I guess the answer has to be traced back to the time when we forgot what the occasion is supposed to be all about. We all know that Christmas has pagan roots and yet, some have been willing to overlook its dubious origins in the hope that something good can come out of it. But alas, it seems that the god of this world has claimed the whole thing back and it is once again a thoroughly pagan event. Yes, even Christians act like pagans as they frantically rush from store to store increasing their debt. Then there are the competitions to outdo everyone else's decorations, size of gifts and meals. Add to this the gluttony and family feuds and we have the makings of a wonderfully spiritual exercise.

As the weather deteriorated over the past couple of weeks with storms, rain and snow in many parts, my wife commented that no amount of foul weather seems to be able to keep people out of the stores. Since Thanksgiving Christians have joined the millions who pay homage to the gods of silver and gold and nothing seems to be able to stop them. Many choose to even forsake the assembling of the saints to worship Mammon along with the world. Others who can never get to church on time rise at 2am in order to stand in line for the opening of the pre-Christmas sales. They, and others will be back in line at midnight on Christmas day in order to exchange their gifts and to cash in on more bargains.

There seems to be very little that is Christian about it all, especially when we consider one very important fact: God did not give us a tie, socks or a motor car - He gave us Himself. How can we compare a gaudy tie with Jesus and a credit card with His precious blood?

One of the assorted motives behind the gifts is the need to bribe the recipient. By this I mean people give each other gifts hoping it would cover the fact that they short-changed their loved ones when it came to giving themselves. Children abuse their mother all year and think they can make up for it by giving her something shiny for Mothers Day. So we hope that a Christmas present will cover the lack of love, devotion and respect of the past year.

Giving gifts at various occasions can be a wonderful expression of care and love but it can never replace giving of ourselves to one another. Parents are too busy chasing success and stuff all year so they salve their conscience by giving their kids things that run on batteries. No number of gadgets can ever repay for a lack of time, love and attention. Giving has to begin with giving ourselves.

The Father has given us many gifts - forgiveness, the church, ministries, the Bible, Spiritual gifts and so on. But He first gave us Jesus. It all began there. At least six verses in the New Testament speak of the fact that "He gave Himself". In the same way we can give God all the gifts we like, if we have not given ourselves first then we are wasting our time. Thus the offering that some put in the bag is not an offering but a bribe - hoping that they can buy God's indulgence for their lack of devotion. Paul speaks glowingly of the Macedonians who gave out of their deep poverty, but more importantly, "they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God" (2Corinthians 8:5).

Any giving we do this Christmas has to begin with giving ourselves - one hundred percent - to the Lord. And then we have to give ourselves to one another. Notice that the verse does not say that they gave "of themselves" but, they "gave themselves". That means without reservation and without holding back.

What would I like for Christmas? The same as I have always wanted. That every believer that I serve would give themselves to the Lord. In fact, it would be a wonderful year if only five people in our church who have been short-changing the Lord would give themselves to Him 100% this year. A new motor car or a house could not make me happier than to see people fulfilling their obligations to the Lord.

Yes, we are obliged to give Him our all. Anything else would just not do since He gave us everything. The Father gave His most precious only begotten Son. Jesus gave His all - to His last drop of blood and His last human breath.

But giving because we feel guilty is also not the right motive to give. There can only be one correct motive and that is love. We should be giving ourselves to the Lord because we love Him and we should be giving ourselves to one another because we love one another. Anything else is a charade and hypocritical.

"...our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works" (Titus 2:13b - 14).

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/anton-bosch/gifts-bribes-and-guilt-offerings/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net