

On the Giving of Gifts at Christmas: Is There a Basis for Doing So?

Jesus Isn't Threatened by Your Christmas Gifts (Tim Challies)

<https://www.challies.com/articles/give-gifts-boldly-this-christmas/>

Christmas is fast approaching and, not surprisingly, my kids are looking forward to seeing what's under the tree. The girls, at least, are still young enough that they are waiting with bated breath to learn what treasures they'll be receiving. I love this. I enjoy their anticipation and am excited to experience their joy as they unwrap what Aileen and I have bought for them. It promises to be a good morning.

At the same time, I think we all feel a little bit of tension between the dual purposes of Christmas—the giving of gifts and the birth of the Savior. It is this time of year when we encounter all kinds of articles about the real gift of Christmas and when we are warned about spending too much money or buying gifts that are too lavish. We need to keep Christ in Christmas and not succumb to materialism, right? We need to ensure that we don't look forward too much to unwrapping new toys, new clothes, new books. The implicit messaging is that Christmas is a kind of either/or proposition in which we can either emphasize Jesus or emphasize gifts. But one always threatens to displace the other.

I disagree with this. I don't think there has to be any tension at all between Jesus and gifts, between a Christmas celebrating the gift of Jesus and a Christmas celebrating the gift of gifts. Both are good. And if both are good, there is no necessary competition between them. I don't think we gain anything as Christians when we continually speak of this tension or when we load people with guilt who are excited to find out what's under the tree.

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Jesus isn't threatened by Christmas gifts. He doesn't get better when we diminish or downplay them, either by eschewing them altogether or by contenting ourselves with gifts that are frugal, that cost us nearly nothing and really aren't that good. We don't threaten the wonder of the incarnation when we give nice gifts to the ones we love and when we look forward to receiving them. We don't need to spiritualize these gifts by assuring ourselves that Jesus is the greatest gift of all. We can just enjoy them on their own terms, we can enjoy them as one of God's innumerable blessings to us. I'm convinced God is thrilled when we give good gifts, when we receive good gifts, when we enjoy good gifts. He's a loving Father and what loving father doesn't take joy in the joy of his children?

Christmas falls on a Sunday this year and I think this gives us an especially good opportunity to see how all of Christmas integrates with our faith, with the Christian life. In the Challies home we will undoubtedly get up early, woken by an excited little girl. We'll head downstairs and the kids will pull the trinkets out of their stockings. Then we will exchange gifts—nice gifts, even (though, of course, we shop smart and keep things within a reasonable budget). We will eat a special breakfast together. Then we will go to church and worship Jesus, celebrating the marvel of God made man. After it all we will return home to a feast. We will do it all, every bit of it, to the glory of God. We will do it all as one great, day-long event that unashamedly enjoys all of God's gifts.

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My Response: *As the Lord of the Universe, Jesus isn't threatened by anything. We ourselves, however, can be distracted or choked by the cares, riches and pleasures of this life, and be drawn away by the lust of the eyes, lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. We are to set our affections on things above, not on things on the earth.*

Timothy Atkins *A good article but missing how gift exchanging is the priority for the culture without Christ. Often the struggle is spending all of the time celebrating on us and not Him, or simple treating Jesus as an addendum on our family celebrating. The Magi in Matthew 2 are a good pattern and picture for us to follow in worshiping Jesus this Christmas season. Thank you for pointing us to be biblical in this matter.*

Lauren Moore Brownfield *"Which one of you, if your son asks for bread, will he give him a stone? And if he ask a fish, will give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more will your father in heaven give good gifts to them that ask them?" Jesus' words in Matthew 7. I'm reminded also of Ezra and Nehemiah telling the people to stop mourning after they heard the word of God and realized how long they had been neglecting his laws. They told them to rejoice and they had a week long festival. Thank you for this post. Joy and festivals and presents are all things God wants us to enjoy. It's easy to forget in our quest to push back against materialism that sucking the fun out of a joyous time can also be damaging to our kids.*

Why DO We Exchange Gifts at Christmas?

- *Is it because the wise men gave gifts to Jesus?* (Matt 2:11) It is interesting to note that the wise men gave gifts in recognition of Jesus' *identity*, not in recognition of His birth (nor at His birth). Their very goal was to find Jesus that they could *worship* Him, not celebrate His birthday. Their initial response when they found Jesus was to fall down and worship Him. Their focus was not on what had arrived, but Who had arrived. The emphasis of the "Christmas story" is God's PRESENCE, not the PRESENTS. It is also very important to note that they gave gifts to *Jesus*, not to one another!
- *Is it because God gave His Gift to us?* (2 Cor 9:15) If so, would not the important point be to encourage people to consider God's Gift or fully rejoice because of Him, rather than distracting from it by the things of this world? The central theme is Christ as Savior, not some physical gift in His place. God's Gift was something money could not buy but what people needed! God could have given gifts. Instead, He gave His Son.
- *Is it because Christians are to give to others in need?* (1 John 3:16-17) If so, giving to those in need is something that we are to do for those in need as a lifestyle, all year long, not just at Christmas. And are we giving to those in need what they *need*?
- *Is there some eternal reward that comes from showering one another with gifts?* It seems that we are somehow misled, thinking that by giving to one another (usually meeting *wants* rather than *needs*) we are building up rewards in heaven. If Luke 14:12-14 has any bearing, it would seem that if we give to those that can give back (and do), we have that reciprocation as our reward alone.
- *Does a focus on gifts encourage our love of God?* (1 John 2:15-17) Are we not to seek the things which are above, NOT the things on the earth? (Col 3:1-5, including "covetousness, which is idolatry") Does not the pile under the tree feed our own wants, and bring the focus to us, rather than to Christ? Is it not still possible yet to succumb to the cares, riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to maturity? (Luke 8:14)