

The Gift Mentality

M. W. Bassford

4-20-08

Introduction.

- A. For many of us, it's a constant spiritual struggle not to whine. Earth, of course, isn't heaven, and that means that we can always find something we're unhappy about. Lest you get the idea that I think I'm above that, I'm not. I often catch myself complaining. In the winter, it's too cold. In the summer, it's too hot. When I lived in an apartment, the neighbors were too loud. Now that I live in a house, there's too much work to do and it's too expensive, and so on. If I'm not careful, my conversation can degenerate into a whine-fest.
- B. Of course, all of the grumbling we do is a problem because it may well motivate others to complain about our complaining, but the real problem with it is a spiritual one. Look at what Moses tells the children of Israel in Deuteronomy 28:45-47. Just like the children of Israel were, if we're honest with ourselves, we will admit that we have been blessed with an abundance of all things. If we allow ourselves to overlook our blessings and complain about them instead, our ingratitude will also lead us to fall away from serving God entirely.
- C. We need to recognize, then, that when we complain, we are actually complaining against God, and we're allowing Satan to use our dissatisfaction as a way of driving a wedge between us and our Creator. The reason why we have this problem is an underlying sense of entitlement. We think that we deserve to have all of our dreams fulfilled, and when that doesn't happen, we feel that the universe is treating us unjustly. Folks, that's exactly the opposite of the way that God's word tells us to think. In reality, we don't even deserve to exist. Destruction is the best that we can expect, and everything above that is an undeserved gift that God has given us. This evening, then, let's look at the way our lives will change if we have this gift mentality instead.

I. The Giver.

- A. For most people with backbones, the idea of relying on someone else to provide for us is a repellent one. We take pride in working for a living and earning what we get. When we see those who can work, but don't, and instead rely on the government to provide for them, we often regard them with contempt.
- B. We have to recognize, though, friends, that we are not nearly as self-reliant as we would like to believe. Look at the description of God the Giver in James 1:17. This is a very beautiful passage. In fact, I've even written a hymn about it. However, it has some significant implications for the way we understand our lives.
- C. First of all, it makes every one of us admit that **EVERY GOOD THING I HAVE CAME FROM GOD**. Certainly, it's to our credit that we have jobs we use to support ourselves and our families, but we need to recognize why we have those jobs. We have them because God gave us the strength and the ability and the will to work, and blessed us by putting us in a land where there are jobs to be had. Even the simple things that we don't think about much are gifts from God. For instance, I'm a total fidget. When I'm thinking during the weekday, it's quite common for me to pace around the church building hallways or auditorium or parking lot. It helps me concentrate. Pacing is something I do without thinking about, yet there are brethren for whom the ability to walk as I do would be an amazing blessing. I doubt, for instance, that Sister Dorothy Seeman has taken a step without pain in decades. Our lives are filled with good things, and it's God who fills them.
- D. Second, each one of us also must admit that **EVERY GOOD THING I WILL HAVE WILL COME FROM GOD**. By nature, I'm a planner. My mind naturally turns to coming years and decades, and I try to make wise decisions now that will be rewarded later. I think it's a good thing for each one of us to wisely consider the future, but we also need to recognize that our planning by itself is inadequate. There's nothing I can do to guarantee that my family will be happy and safe and provided for 20 years from now. The only way that will occur is if God graciously consents to bless us. As with past blessings, all future blessings come from Him.
- E. Finally, because these things are true, we must each acknowledge that **I AM TOTALLY DEPENDENT ON GOD FOR GOOD THINGS IN MY LIFE**. I don't earn the good things that I have. I receive them. If I forget that, if I start trusting in my own wisdom and my own power, I'm really missing the point of existence.

II. The Gifts.

- A. Now that we recognize that God is the giver of every good thing, let's look at some of the gifts that He gives us. First of all, God is the one who supplies us with the **NECESSITIES OF LIFE**. Consider the testimony of Paul on this point in Acts 14:17. Notice that he's talking here to people who aren't Christians. These Gentiles, who have never been a part of God's people before, still have benefited from God's care, for He's the One who sustains them and their families. Of course, mankind can still mess these blessings up. If we refuse to work, the Bible teaches that we are not to eat, either. In areas of the world that suffer from famine, these famines are typically caused by war and the actions of evil men. However, it is still God's love that provides for us.
- B. Similarly, God is the one who has blessed us with the institution of **MARRIAGE**. Jesus tells us this in Matthew 19:4-5. For every one of us who is lawfully married, that union is a gift from God. Of course, people do a

marvelous job of messing this one up too. The most recent statistics I've seen tell us that 40% of first-time marriages in this country end in divorce, and of the marriages that last, about a third of those are unhappy. The problem here is not that 60% of God's gifts are defective. The problem is that we make unwise and sinful choices that ruin the good gift that He gave us. Marriage itself, though, is undeniably a blessing from above.

- C. Third, God blesses us with **CHILDREN**. The Psalmist tells us this in basically so many words in Psalm 127:3-4. This, too, is a gift that people around us will spectacularly wreck. There are hundreds of thousands of people in this country every year who think so little of the precious gift of their children that they choose to kill them before they are even born. There are untold millions more who, although they don't kill their children, don't live for them either. Some abandon their families to pursue sin with other people, making sure that their children won't have the benefit of the full child-raising team that God designed. Others leave their children behind to go to work, not because they have to, but because they want to escape from what they see as the boredom and tedium of family life. Some days I wonder if, hundreds of years from now, historians will look back on why the United States fell and say, "It was because they didn't take care of their children." However, this terrible misuse of God's gift doesn't make our children any less a gift from Him.
- D. Finally, we are blessed with **EVERY SPIRITUAL BLESSING** in the heavenly places. Paul says so in Ephesians 1:3. Of course, unlike the other three gifts in this list, this is a gift that is only given to children of God. However, because all of us can become Christians, these too are gifts in which all of us can share. We too can fully know the blessings of God that we see in His word, in His answers to our prayers, in His forgiveness of our sins, and the innumerable other gifts we have from Jesus. Of course, just like all the other gifts we've considered, we can misuse these things too. The Bible sees more misuse and distortion than any other book in history. There are people who consider themselves Christians who haven't prayed by themselves in years. Christians can even turn away from God's forgiveness to pursue the life of sin He hates. However, all the ways that we can abuse God's gifts don't alter either their basic nature or their source.

III. Our Response.

- A. As we consider these gifts and many more we don't have time to mention, it becomes evident that there are several ways in which we need to respond to them. First of all, we need to learn to **TRUST IN GOD** to provide for us. Look at what David writes in Psalm 37:25-26. God does not forsake the righteous, and this is apparent in all areas of our lives. Of course, Satan wants us to believe the opposite. He wants us to believe that sometimes, we have to forsake the assembly to provide for our family's physical needs. He wants us to believe that if we want to get married, we have to marry someone who doesn't have a heart for God, because there aren't any Christians out there. We can even look to the pages of Scripture for the story of Abraham and Sarah coming up with their own scheme for having children, because they didn't think that God would come through for them. None of those things are true. God will provide for us what we need. Times might be a little bit tighter because we give ourselves to the Lord first, but we aren't going to starve, and in the end, we and our families will be rewarded eternally in heaven. We might have to wait a little bit longer to find a righteous man or woman to marry, but there are plenty in this room right now who can testify to the struggles and the heartache associated with not waiting. If we just trust in God, He will surely provide for us.
- B. Second, we also need to learn to **BE THANKFUL**. We learn about what the scope of our thanksgiving should be in 1 Thessalonians 5:18. This, of course, makes perfect sense. Our mothers train most of us, at least, from an early age to say "Thank you" whenever someone does something nice for us. If everything nice comes to us from God, we should say "Thank You" to Him for everything. Ideally, every time something happens in our lives that we enjoy, we should pause to give thanks to God for the blessing that we have just received. Let's work on developing that. At least once in the coming week, when it's a pretty day outside, or we've just eaten a delicious meal, or we've just spend a contented evening with our family, let's say a quick prayer to thank God. He deserves that thanks in everything. Let's give it to Him as much as possible.
- C. Finally, we also need to learn to **TAKE CARE OF OUR GIFTS**. Sometimes, this can be a struggle for us. I can remember one of the brothers here telling a story about how he sold his old Transformer collection to help put together a down payment for his house. Brethren, I could not have done that. I had my share of Transformers back in the day, but they all died. Sideswipe lost a wheel when I took him to school in second grade. Mirage got snapped in half. Megatron lost a leg, and so on. I didn't take care of my gifts. I'm not terribly proud of that, even though I was only a child when it happened. What's much sadder is when so many adults don't take care of the gifts they have from God. Of course, that's not what God expects. Look at the words of Jesus in Luke 12:48. Where do we stand in this? Are we good stewards of our material blessings, or do we waste them and mistreat them? Do we try to nurture and care for our marriages, or do we just thoughtlessly run them into the ground because we care more about ourselves than about the great gift that we have been given? Do we appreciate our children and devote our lives to them, or are they just a distraction from the things we really care about? Only when we do take care of our gifts do we honor God.

Conclusion. If you aren't honoring God by using your life for Him, today is a wonderful day to start.