



Does Gift-giving Undermine the Reason for the Season?



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Let's face it, for a large percentage of our culture Christmas is all about gift-giving. 'Tis the season for checking Amazon wish lists, scouting holiday deals, and stampeding mobs through Walmart on Black Friday. Everything from car dealerships to pet stores seek to capitalize on the "giving season." Jesus goes unmentioned (unless you're lucky enough to catch the classic, "*A Charlie Brown Christmas*"), and the holiday is wrenched from its Christian context. The commercialization of this once sacred holiday is at times both saddening and maddening for the Christian, and we are left asking the question whether or not we should participate in this cultural tradition of gift-giving. Does gift-giving undermine the reason for the season?

To answer this question, we have to first ask ourselves, "What is the reason for the season?" And of course, the answer to that question is both wonderfully simple and infinitely complex. Christmas is a celebration of God's amazing grace and love, in that He took the initiative to reconcile man and God by *giving* His own Son to die in the place of rebel sinners like you and me (*Rom.5:8*). It is a celebration of God come in the flesh in the person of His beloved Son—born that man no more may die (*John 1:14*). It is a celebration of God with us, Immanuel (*Is.7:14; Matt.1:23*). It is a celebration of the Savior come into the world, *giving* His own life so that all who believe in Him might be *given* the free *gift* of eternal life (*John 3:16*). So, you see, Christmas is all about gift-giving, after all. It's all about God's gift to us.

So, given that the reason for the season is to celebrate God's gift of Jesus Christ to us, are we undermining that message when we give gifts to other people? The answer is, it depends on our where our focus is.

It's very easy for us to give an acknowledgment that Christ is our focus during the Christmas season, but often our actions speaks louder than our words. Be honest, the amount of time, energy, and passion we display toward buying and receiving gifts often exceeds the time, energy, and passion we display toward

Christ and serving Him and others. In fact, it is not uncommon for the very act of buying and receiving gifts to lead to sinful thoughts and behaviors such as impatience, greed, selfishness, covetousness, and idolatry. In this sense, gift-giving certainly can undermine the reason for the season.

How then do we guard ourselves from this loss of focus?

1. Commit to seeking Jesus every day. Commit to seek Him in His Word and in prayer every day, despite the busyness and hectic schedules, so that you might know Him and delight in Him as your Savior and Lord.
2. Refuse to allow the gifts you give or receive to dominate your anticipation of Christmas. Gifts can be nice tokens of love or appreciation to family and friends, but they should not be what we most anticipate about that day. Rather, we should be eager to praise God for His immeasurable gift.
3. Take time to teach your children what we celebrate at Christmas. Teaching serves not only to help our young ones understand, but reminds us parents of what we can so easily forget.
4. Consider your gifts more thoughtfully. There are always stocking stuffers and toys and gadgets that can and will be replaced by new ones next year; but instead of, or in addition to, these things, consider giving more meaningful and life-changing gifts. For example, you could donate in your friend's name to a God-honoring charity; or reserve a space for your family to serve together at a local soup-kitchen.
5. Take the opportunity to proclaim God's gift. During the Christmas season, gifts are on people's minds. What a great opportunity to tell them about the greatest gift of all, the gift of God's own Son.

The magi understood that Christmas was about God's gift to men, women, and children around the world, and they responded by bringing gifts of their own to Jesus.

- What can you and/or your family do this Christmas season to give a gift of love and adoration to Jesus?
- What do you need to do to make sure your focus is on Christ this Christmas season?

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