

# "The Greatest Exchange"

Galatians 4:4-7

December 29, 2013

1st Sunday After Christmas

Christmas is over (at least in the secular world) and all the shopping is finished. Yet people are going back to the stores. Why? As if we had not had enough sales in the last two months, there are now after-Christmas sales to take advantage of. But there is another reason for venturing back to the shopping centers. People are going back to the stores to redeem gift certificates they got for Christmas and to exchange gifts that were not the right size, not the right color, or maybe something not really needed or wanted. When you redeem a gift certificate or exchange the gift, you want to receive equal value back. You want to receive a product worth the amount of the gift certificate, money equal to the cost of the gift exchanged or the same thing back in a different color or size. If you got less money back or you got a cheaper product, you would feel cheated, wouldn't you?

Imagine how God felt on that first Christmas long ago! He sent a wonderful Christmas gift to this world: His Son, Jesus Christ, born in Bethlehem and wrapped in the straw of a manger. And what did He get in return for this wonderful gift? Our lesson says that God sent His Son "to redeem (purchase) those who were under law." In other words, He got you and me in return!

Is that a fair exchange? Let's compare it: Jesus is true God. We are mortal human beings. Jesus is almighty and all powerful. We are weak and the strength we have is limited. But, most important of all, Jesus is holy and righteous. Now we may think we are pretty good, but we would never call ourselves "holy and righteous", would we? We are sinful -- born in sin, the Bible declares, and committing sin often, as each of us can see when we examine our thoughts, words, and deeds honestly and openly in the light of God's Law. God's Son who is almighty, holy, and perfect comes to this world in exchange for people who are weak, sinful, and imperfect. Is that a fair exchange? Did God cheat Himself?



There is no way that it is a fair exchange for God. It would be like you being in a gift exchange and giving an exquisite piece of the finest crystal wine goblets, wrapped in gold foil paper and topped with a silver bow and getting a drinking glass which was a jelly jar and wrapped in a dirty newspaper. But God did *not* cheat Himself. God didn't fool Himself. He went into this gift exchange with eyes wide open. He *wanted* to do this. He wanted to exchange His Son for us. Does that mean God wants sinful human beings? No! God sent His Son so that we would be changed. He gave His Son "so that we might receive adoption as sons."

It's comparable to what happens in families today. Most children are born naturally into their families. But some children are not born into their families. They are born unwanted or without parents who loved them. Other people then adopt them and bring them into their families. Those children did not decide to join the family and they couldn't do that even if they wanted to. Their parents had to seek them out, pay all the costs, and do all the work to adopt them. Now, with the parents having done all that, those children are full members of those families and have all the rights as children.

God has done the same thing for us. We were not born into God's holy family. We were born apart from Him in sin, unwanted and abandoned. We did not deserve to enter God's family and we could not accomplish that ourselves even if we tried. But God decided to adopt us. He sent His Son on Christmas to come and get us. Jesus paid all the costs for us to be adopted and join God's holy family. He paid the penalty for our sin by suffering hell and dying in our place on the cross. He rose from the dead and became alive. That was God the Father's signature on the final adoption papers. The Son of God - born on Christmas, died on Good Friday, and arose on Easter - had done everything so that we could become God's sons and daughters.

And what did we do? Nothing! Earlier in Galatians, it says, "You are all sons of God through faith in Jesus Christ." We do nothing to cause our adoptions as sons and daughters of God, but simply trust that it has happened.

If you think God didn't get a fair deal in this first Christmas gift exchange, you should realize that you didn't either. You deserved nothing as a spiritual orphan, but received everything by becoming God's sons and daughters. You have all the rights as children in God's family.

This means we can approach God as children approach their father without fear or hesitancy. As the text says, "And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba, Father'." From baptism onwards, His Spirit lives in you and allows you to call Him, "Father!" Paul continues, "you are no longer a slave, but a son." You are not slaves who fear God and must work hard to appease Him. You are children who love Him and receive His blessings because Jesus has already appeased His anger through His death on the cross.

He will care for your physical needs. He will protect you from danger and troubles. He will be with you during sadness and grief. You can trust Him to do those things as your Heavenly Father. Sometimes parents here on earth abuse their children or abandon them. We read awful stories about those situations often and some of you perhaps know of such situations. But God is a different kind of Father. He never does that. God has promised in His Word, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." And God always keeps his promises. Now, all of the bad things in our lives will not suddenly go away because we are the children of God. We live in a world broken by sin. But our Heavenly Father will be there with us during those bad times.

And, when we mess up, what will happen? If you have children and they make mistakes, you don't kick them out of the family. Parents forgive their children again and again and again.

Parents will always love their children. It doesn't mean they accept their children's bad behavior, but they accept them. God is the same way and even better. When you sin and break God's Law, He doesn't kick you out of His family. But He forgives you again and again because of Jesus' blood shed on the cross. He doesn't accept your sinful behavior, but He accepts you. Some parents here on earth, sadly enough, *do* give up on their children because of constant bad behavior, but God never gives up on you. His mercy never ends and never is exhausted. You can leave Him, but He will never leave you.

Children have one more right. They are heirs of their parents. That means they will inherit their parents possessions after they die. Our text says, "if [you are] a son, then an heir through God." We receive many blessings from God here on earth, but we also will receive more blessings in the future. We inherit all that God has because He died on the cross.

Jesus said, "In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. " We experience grief, pain, and suffering here on this earth, just as Jesus experienced grief, pain and suffering. We share those things with Jesus. But we will also share His glory in heaven. Jesus is preparing a place of glory for each believer in heaven. He died that we might have it. He rose again to guarantee that place in heaven. He ascended to prepare that home for us. And, when we die, we will inherit it -- the right we have as children of God. We live as His children here on this earth for a short time. We will live as His children in heaven forever. We eagerly await for that promise to be kept.

If you were exchanging gifts this Christmas season, I hope you were successful and were able to exchange them fairly. But remember the first Christmas gift exchange in history because it *wasn't* fair. God exchanged His holy, innocent, perfect Son for sinful, guilty, evil human beings - you and me. God gave up His Son so that we could become His sons and daughters by faith

in Jesus. Jesus gave up everything -- even His life -- so that we who had nothing could get all of God's blessings here on earth and inherit His Kingdom in heaven forever. A familiar Christmas hymn puts it this way: "We are rich for He was poor; Is not this a wonder? Therefore, praise God evermore here on earth and yonder." The greatest Christmas exchange there ever was was not a fair exchange. And, for that, we truly praise God evermore. Amen.