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## Gleanings

### The Two Greatest Gifts



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Christmas is a time when both organizations and individuals express benevolence. Many organizations give year-end bonuses or Christmas gifts. And many individuals give of their time, talent, and/or treasure to serve others.

Giving is about expressing care and concern for mankind. And while it is a great blessing to give, what if you were the recipient, what gift would you like? Better yet, can you identify the two *greatest* gifts?

Given the reality that humans live under the sentence of death, the greatest gift of all must surely be a solution to death. Biblically, there is only one efficacious solution to death—the gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ.

If you have received the free gift of eternal life in Christ, what would be the next greatest gift? Would it be fame, fortune, influence, or pleasure? Depending on your situation, it might be healing from disease or restoration of broken relationships or freedom from captivity or wisdom for some intellectual breakthrough. But all these requests are only temporal in nature.

Eternal life in Christ is not temporal. It is transcendent, but it has implications for how one lives in this existence. Perhaps the second-greatest gift request should share these same traits. If so, what would this gift be?

May I suggest that the second-greatest gift of all is to know why Christ created you, that is, the divine intent and purpose for your existence.

Given the reality of a universe originating from the willful actions of a sovereign Creator, then everything in the universe finds its meaning, purpose, and significance in relationship to the Creator.

I became a Christian as a young man and grew up in a denominational paradigm. Based on this experience, I concluded that Christianity was largely a ticket to heaven. My assumption was that all I needed to do was to be active in a local church and live mostly according to the ethical standards of the Bible. If I did this, I could define the rest of my life with little connection to God. My thinking, however, was not biblical.

Scripture makes it clear that we are not saved from eternal judgment solely to go to heaven. And we are not saved so that we can continue living according to our will and ways. God has a much bigger plan. Salvation has implications for how we live here and now. In addition to being saved from eternal death, we are also saved so that we can fulfill his purposes here and now in his meta-narrative. In other words, Christians are saved to do the will of God according to the ways of God. Note the following text:

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works [*ergon*], so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works [*ergon*], which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:8–10 NIV)

From this text, one can see that salvation from sin and death is a free gift of God based on Christ's work (Ephesians 2:4–7). We receive this gift by faith in Christ; there are no works that we can perform to earn salvation.

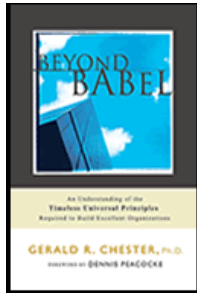
The word *works* appears twice in the text and both times it is the Greek word *ergon*, which is the general word for *work*. The first time the word appears is to stress that there is no *ergon* that a person can perform to save him or her from the penalty of sin and death. The second time the word appears stresses that once a person has received salvation by grace through faith in Christ, that person demonstrates the reality of his or her salvation by their *eraon*. In other





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words, works don't save, but works demonstrate who is saved. This is one of the most subtle realities of Christianity and one that seems to be easily misunderstood.

Christianity is a comprehensive way of life. This means that salvation is more than a ticket to heaven. A Christian does not have the right to define his or her life. When a person becomes a Christian, he or she enters into a process whereby his or her *ergon* is performed consistent with the plan and purpose of God. This is the sense of the last sentence of the above text: "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" Ephesians 2:10 NIV.

The plan and purpose of God through history is known as the meta-narrative. This is a unified overarching continuous story of history rooted in Christ. The meta-narrative begins with creation in the absence of sin, and ends with re-creation and the resolution of sin. Sin entered creation through Adam and Eve, which necessitated the work of Christ to eradicate the impact of sin on creation. Therefore the story of history is about Christ as the Creator, Christ as the Redeemer, and Christ as the Restorer. From beginning to end, everything that happens fits into the meta-narrative.

Therefore every person and organization finds his or her meaning and significance in the context of the meta-narrative. This means that to find one's purpose and destiny in the meta-narrative is a critical step toward understanding the meaning of one's life.

For example, if you are in the food business you are providing sustenance to enable people to have the energy they need to do their *ergon*. If you are in the transportation business you help people go to their respective assigned places to do their *ergon*. If you are in the communications business, you facilitate the requisite communication to enable people to do their *ergon*. All these activities are connected to God's meta-narrative in Christ.

If you are persuaded that God has a purpose for your life in the meta-narrative, then how do you find your purpose? One of God's mysteries is that he conceals our destinies in our hearts. But our destinies can be discovered. He has charged us to seek him so that we each can discover our purpose and destiny (Proverbs 25:2). Therefore it is the responsibility of each person to seek the Lord to discover his or her individual life purpose. And when we seek him, this is an act of faith that pleases him and he rewards those who seek him (Hebrews 11:5) with revelation about his purpose and destiny for each of us.

What a marvelous reality. Life is not an empty purposeless existence. Our Creator loves us so much that he has a purpose for each of us to play in his meta-narrative. This makes life meaningful and significant, and provides direction for our *ergon*.

The greatest gift of all is to receive the free gift of eternal life in Jesus Christ. And the second-greatest gift is to discover God's purpose for your life in the context of the meta-narrative. The greatest gift deals with the issues of sin and death. And the second-greatest gift provides meaning and purpose to life by doing God's will according to God's ways in the context of the meta-narrative.

The greatest gift requires nothing of us except a response of faith in Christ as our Savior. The second-greatest gift flows from an expression of extreme gratitude for the greatest gift. Our gratitude should be so great that we surrender our will and ways to do God's will according to his ways. These are the greatest gifts of life—they are priceless!

May we embrace Christ as Savior and his purpose for our lives with great gratitude and then find and fulfill our purpose in the meta-narrative. There are no greater gifts to give or receive.

Merry Christmas!

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