

You Get All the Presents



solid stand (vv.10-11)



scenic sanctuary (vv.16-23)

In the name of Jesus, our newborn Savior, dear presents of God:

When you read a theme like, **You Get All the Presents**, doesn't that take you back to the days when you couldn't get too excited about underwear and socks for Christmas? But a shiny Tonka truck or lovely Barbie doll could light up your eyes like little elves. Must be quite a few people wanting to relive the "magic of Christmas," as they call it. Google the 1983 movie, *A Christmas Story*, all over cable this year, and you get almost three million hits. The first one reads: "Christmas Story Leg Lamp...It's A Major Award." Now people are lining up for "leg lamp" ornaments. But that was his dad's "major award." Ralphie just wanted a certain BB gun. He didn't care about anything else under the tree.

That illustrates one of our major problems, doesn't it? That one thing we want, we cannot have. And the more we cannot have it, the more we really want it. Envy sets in at every age because someone else always has a better BB gun, a nicer car, or a bigger house. And it's not just things, but people and positions make us sick with envy. But God has an awesome cure. Ready for this? The Holy Spirit says, **You Get All the Presents**. "Who me?" you ask? "Who gets **All the Presents**?"



solid stand (vv.10-11)

Christmas trees are about as close as some people ever get to building something. Otherwise, who really thinks about a solid foundation? But load that evergreen with lights, tinsel and ornaments, and you may find the tree toppled to the floor. With Christmas trees it's hard to hide the lack of a **solid stand**.

Christmas was falling over for many Christians at Corinth. They were loaded down with the sin of envy. The congregation sparkled with talent, like a tree top heavy with ornaments – everyone trying to get a leg up on everyone else. But they were teetering in one of those old style stands with bolts on the side. One wanted to follow "Paul," another "Apollos," someone else "Cephas," or "Peter." Envy was like tightening one bolt on the old stand and loosening the rest. Some just tried to balance the tree by a miracle, saying, **"I follow Christ"** (1:12 NIV), as if no one else did. The congregation was gilded with envy. No matter how shiny Christian they might seem, personality and talent are not a **solid stand**.

How do you help a child who's sick with envy? How do you help your own heart when jealous discontent makes you feel cracked and broken like the ornament that fell off the tree? You can't give the child everything he wants. Even grandparents will pay a high price for spoilage. And our heavenly Father cannot give us everything we want, can He? So, how is it true: **You Get All the Presents**?

First things first. The dear Holy Spirit sets up a **solid stand**. He inspired these words to open Paul's first letter to the envy-stricken Corinthians: **"I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought. My brothers, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you."** (1:10f NIV) The tree is leaning.

Let's get it back on a **solid stand**. Three chapters later: **"By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ."** You know how Paul tried when his name was still Saul to lay some foundation besides Jesus Christ. Saul went around persecuting Christians. But God's grace got through, changed his heart and sent Paul all over the world with the sweet Good News that takes our envy all away. We have God's greatest Gift in the Christ of God. He gave us His Son! Does it matter who brings this Gift?

When UPS, or FedEx, or SpeeDee pulls up, do you worry which company it is? Or are you just asking, “Is that for me?” When the delivery man comes to the door, would you refuse if his name was “Ralphie”? It’s just as foolish when Christians order their presents from Corinth and play favorites with God’s messengers. It dishonors the Christ of Christmas when we’re more concerned about how entertaining the speaker is than the message he comes to bring. If he feeds our envy by telling us we deserve to get more riches from God by some “How to…” technique, you might as well get out the old metal stand and loosen all the bolts. There’s never anything **solid** in sin. And there’s nothing **solid** about building on any other foundation besides Jesus Christ. Standing strong on Him, we have a...

 **scenic sanctuary (vv.16-23)**

Do you remember the scene in *A Christmas Story* where Ralphie finally snaps? It’s not too scenic in the alley when the neighborhood bullies keep chasing Ralphie and his friends. But one day they catch him and push just a bit too hard. All the kids are watching Ralphie pound away until his mom pulls him off. It took a mom to rescue the bully! And it took his mom to rescue Ralphie from his dad at supper.

Now picture the way God snapped on our enemies when He sent the Christ of Christmas. Paul tells us why right here: **“Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him; for God’s temple is sacred, and you are that temple.”** When pastors pass off their own opinions as the Word of God, they might as well fly the flag for hell and wear a badge for Satan. God takes it personally as if someone attacked your child. If Ralphie finally fights back in self defense, a cool cloth on his forehead shows how you care for him.

But God’s Son had to take a different tack to save us for Himself. **“Do not deceive yourselves. If any one of you thinks he is wise by the standards of this age, he should become a “fool” so that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God’s sight. As it is written: “He catches the wise in their craftiness”; and again, “The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile.”** Futile as it seems to human logic, God’s Son came to face off with Satan and let Himself be crucified. He let the serpent bite His heel in order to crush Satan’s head by rising from the dead. Christ cut lose on Satan, death and hell with vengeance only Ralphie could understand. That’s Christ for us.

With Christ as your Champion, don’t worship the foot soldiers. Or as Paul puts it: **“No more boasting about people! All things are yours, whether Paul, Apollos, Peter, the world, life or death, the present or the future—everything is yours. And you belong to Christ and Christ belongs to God.”**

God’s answer to envy: **“All things are yours.”** The **scenic sanctuary** of your new cell phone. That cottage by the lake. The German road car with the Autobahn all to yourself. **“All things are yours.”** Far richer are the gifts money cannot buy. Friends and loved ones to talk to on the cell phone, so that you don’t have to fake it in stores. Good cheer deep inside your soul, so that you don’t have to sit by the lake feeling guilty. A heart bursting with love for others, so that you’re more willing to share the road and help those who get stranded along the way. And the best is Christ’s **scenic sanctuary** in your soul.

“But Pastor,” you say. “God only gives us what we need, not what we want.” Dear soul, that’s not all. God says, **“Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart.”** (Psalm 37:4 NIV) It’s just a matter of eternity. Here in time our loving God will not let anything come between us. So we may not get to use all His things yet. But look in your closet. How many clothes can you wear at once? They’re still yours, aren’t they? God says, **You Get All the Presents.** He gives us **life** by His death and secures our **death** by His life. He gives us **the present** by living with us and secures our **future** by promising we will live with Him. God gave us His own Son. He will not withhold anything good.

A heart filled with contentment has no room for envy. Just before Jesus died for you He prayed: **“Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am....”** (John 17:24 NIV) You see? Jesus wanted us bad enough to die for us. And God gave us to Jesus. We are **the Presents.** Let God wrap you up in His loving arms and put you under the tree for Jesus. Let your heart be His **scenic sanctuary.** Freed from envy, we can say to our loving Lord: Jesus, **You Get All the Presents.** Take me. Amen.