

## I. The Origin and Counterfeit Nature of Christmas

I am so glad that you are here today. I always want my people to be totally informed and understand, especially understanding the concept of Christmas. I am not a Grinch; I am not here to steal Christmas. I am not here to put an end to Santa Claus or any of those things. You were down at the restart last week; we had John Hill, who is our station Santa Claus every year. He is always the one who does that because he has worn that Santa Claus suit for twelve years, and nobody else will ever put it on again.

Most Americans do not understand the concept of Christmas and Santa Claus. It is a relatively new concept of Santa Claus anyhow. It was in 1822 in America that Clement Clarke Moore wrote that now famous "Night Before Christmas." People quote that and say that and put it on cards. They think it has been around forever, and it really has not. In 1863, there was a cartoonist by the name of Thomas Nast. He gave us our rendition of Santa Claus today as the jolly old guy with a red suit and a reindeer. That started with him.

But long before that, in the early 4th century, there was a Roman Catholic bishop whose name was Nicholas. He gave gifts to children on and around December 25th. He was noted for that. He later became a saint canonized by the Roman Catholic Church. Yes, you can guess now, that is where the original Saint Nicholas comes from, or as we know, Saint Nick. That is where the birth of Santa Claus really came from. He is now, as we speak today, the patron saint to children. Of course, the Catholic Church has a patron saint to everybody: dogs, turtles, they have everything, travelers. But he is a patron saint to children.

I know we live in America, but if you have ever traveled to Europe, you will know that around Christmas time you will see images of Santa Claus there. In Europe, Santa Claus is always portrayed much like the Santa Claus we have here with a beard and a red suit, but he always has the Pope's miter hat on because they know in Europe that he comes out of the Roman Catholic Church. Sometimes he is called the Father of Christmas. We know that Christmas is two words put together: Christ's Mass, connected with the Roman Catholic Church.

We had a young man Thursday night in our Thursday night Bible study who asked a great question. We have a bunch of young guys and gals that just come into the church that I think are very sharp and very good people. He asked a very good question about the true birthday of Jesus Christ. I told him that night as we walked you through and I showed you where it starts and where it all comes from. I told you we were going to talk about it today.

The concept of December 25th being the birthday of Christ, there again, that did not start in the New Testament. It did not start with the early church. It does not come into play until almost 300 years after Christianity has been moving along. No one in the first 300 years ever recognized that or celebrated that. The early church certainly did not. The early Christians certainly did not. But when Constantine came to power with the Roman Empire, when he allowed all the pagans to come into the church with his Edict of Milan, he basically allowed that to come in, and all those

pagan holidays then became Christian holidays. That is where, I just want you to understand, that is where the birth of all this comes.

In reality, if you get "The Two Babylons" by Alexander Hislop, as Bob talked about, or "Babylon and Mystery Religion" by Ralph Woodrow, you will find that December 25th in pagan times was the birthday of Baal, the Sun God. All the stuff that goes along with it, the Yule Festival for this time of year, and December 25th, the first or second, I forget, this last week was the Winter Solstice, that is the shortest day on the planet. It all stems around that particular time there.

I told you Thursday night how out of Jeremiah chapter 10 you find the concept of the Christmas tree. That is a fake tree of life and how they all did that back there. Today people say that, and you hear it all the time because Christmas has become so commercialized and Christmas has become so much about presents and all of the things that people do, that they say today we have lost the real meaning of Christmas. I told you Thursday night, in truth, there never was a real meaning to Christmas from a Bible standpoint connected with the birth of Christ.

One cannot miss, if you have the understanding, how the world always likes to replace Jesus Christ with somebody. We know that false religions do that, but almost everything in life that the world does tries to counterfeit Christ. The concept of Kris Kringle, Santa Claus, Old Saint Nick, one cannot miss, if you have the understanding talked about in the book of Proverbs, how he is a counterfeit of the real Christ. You have to remember, in the Bible there are two Christs. The word "Christ" means "Christos," it means "anointed one." You will find in the book of Revelation that the Bible is very clear to talk about the Lord's Christ because the devil himself is a Christ. He is the anointed cherub. Christ is the anointed Son of God. So in that sense, they are both Christ. The early church from Antioch up to the Reformation never observed either Easter or Christmas. So these are the things that you want to know.

Let me show you how the counterfeit fits here. When you think of Santa Claus, he always is in a red suit.

*> Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save.*

When it talks about the Lord Jesus Christ, He has vestures dipped in blood; they are red. He comes out of the north; Santa Claus supposedly does. We know from Psalms chapter 75 that heaven is north, and when the Lord makes His return at the Second Coming of Christ, I know He comes from the east, but when He comes down and leaves the third heaven, He comes from the north. When you go up to the North Pole, you would find that Santa Claus is a carpenter by trade.

*> Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at him.*

So was the Lord Jesus Christ. Santa Claus is omniscient; he is all-knowing. He sees you when you are sleeping. He knows when you are awake.

- > O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me.
- > Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off.
- > Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways.
- > For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether.
- > Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me.
- > Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it.
- > Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?
- > If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there.
- > If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea;
- > Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.
- > If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me.
- > Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee.
- > For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb.
- > I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well.
- > My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.
- > Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.
- > How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them!
- > If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with thee.
- > Surely thou wilt slay the wicked, O God: depart from me therefore, ye bloody men.
- > For they speak against thee wickedly, and thine enemies take thy name in vain.
- > Do not I hate them, O LORD, that hate thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee?
- > I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them their enemies.
- > Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts:
- > And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

This shows you how David says, "Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?" Santa Claus has a book like the Lord does.

*> And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them.*

He judges you out of that book whether you have been good or bad. "Be good for goodness sake," is my advice to you today. He is eternal. He has been around forever. He lives forever. There will never be a time, if the Lord postpones coming and the earth revolves for another 10,000 years, Santa Claus will still be just like he was. He is eternal in that sense, much like the Lord Jesus Christ. You will find that when you see pictures of him, he has a white beard and white hair.

*> His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire;*

You will find that Christ's hair is like wool; it is white, the glory of God. Little children always gravitate toward Santa Claus. I have never met a little kid that did not want to believe in Santa Claus or did believe in Santa Claus, and I am not here to tear your little world down, but it is a true statement. Little kids always gravitated to Santa Claus, and then when those kids got older, they did not believe him anymore. Just like little kids are gravitated to the Lord Jesus, and then when you get older, you do not believe Him anymore. It is an incredible little concept as you come all the way down through it and you study it.

He has the ability of supernatural travel. He can be everywhere in 24 hours in the world. He can drop presents off with everybody; he has time for the cookies and the milk you leave him. He is an incredible guy. When he comes to your house, he brings you gifts.

*> Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.*

The Bible says that when Christ died on the cross and went back to heaven, He gave good gifts unto men.

## II. My Position on Christmas

Let me explain my position on Christmas. I do not want you to think that though I am giving you a lot of facts today, my message has a point to it today, and we will get to it here in a moment. But here is my take on Christmas. You know I am about as far from being a legalist as anybody could ever be. To think of me as a legalist is pretty unimaginable. The reason as a church we do not celebrate Christmas in the sense that we do not have a tree, we do not have all of the things around it many churches do. Please, I am not fighting anybody who wants to do that. I have my own reasons for why I do things, and I try to base them on the Bible.

Now, you come to my house, we have a Christmas tree. It is very ugly, but we have one. I go to your house, you have one, probably in better shape than ours. You all have presents under the tree; we have presents under our tree. You are all going to celebrate Christmas today and eat

together with your family. So are we. I am not a Jehovah's Witness that is completely devoid of any holidays. I understand them. When you have the book of Proverbs, as we talked about, it gives you understanding.

Here is why as a church, and I just want you to understand this. Here is why as a church, in our service today, and then I want to explain to you my own personal thing on it. Here is in a church today, I understand the devil wants to be God. That has always been his deal. All the way back in Isaiah chapter 14 and Ezekiel chapter 28, he said, "I will be like the Most High God." In Matthew chapter 4, when he comes and tempts the Lord Jesus Christ, one of the things that he tries to tempt Him with, he says, he took Him up and he showed Him all the kingdoms of the world. He says, "If you bow down and worship me as God, I will give you all these kingdoms." He wants to be God.

When you get into the Bible, you understand how much he really does and how he tries to orchestrate all events on Earth that take the honoring glory that should be to God and take it to himself. It is just that simple. He wants all the adoration that God's people should be giving to God. He wants that for himself. So what he does, he conspires to take pagan holidays and he cloaks them in a Christian theme. He brings them into God's church. God has nothing to do with them. It has nothing to do with Christ. Then God's people are giving all this praise and honor to a day that was really the birthday of Baal. The devil walks out the door of God's church getting all the honor and glory that was designed for God's Son.

I do not know if you remember, in Acts 12:21, Herod did the same thing. Herod claimed to be God and be on equal par with God, and God came down and killed him right on the spot. There are enough things in my life that I give place to the devil too, that I am not going to consciously do it in a place where this place is designed to bring honor and glory to the Lord Jesus Christ. I know that we cannot be biblical in everything just because we are human and we make mistakes, but I want to tell you this, when it comes to the Bible and what we do know, we are going to try to stay on track with that Book as close as we can.

That does not mean that I criticize other places. You will drive up and down the streets and you will see churches with cantatas, you will see them going on with Christmas this, you will see nativity scenes out there. You know what? I do not care. I will never get up and preach a message on it. I am informing you because I want to give you something special today that is better than what you have under the tree waiting for you at home. That is what I want to do. That is all I want to do.

When you stop and think about it, it is the same thing the devil does with all the new Bibles. They are his Bibles. He brings them into God's church, and he gets you to study God through his Bible. It is incredible what he can do. The plan was so incredibly laid out that today, honestly, 99% of God's people in the world actually think that Christ was born on December 25th. Everything that goes on in the world in religion today comes back to that. Again, I do not care. I just want to know the truth about things.

Now, let us be clear on this. I am not anti-Christmas as long as I understand it and I am not deceived by it and I can use it. I am like Paul. One time over there in Acts 21, Paul went into a

scenario, and this is long after Christ had come and died on the cross. The Old Testament concept of Judaism had passed away, and God was dealing with the church now. Paul went into the synagogue. He did everything that those Jews did. He purified himself. He cut his hair. He did everything he was supposed to do because he wanted to reach them. Paul is a model where he says, "And there I become all things to all men that I may win some."

I understand that I can use Christmas as I can Easter. I will not bring it into God's house and let the devil take the honor and glory that goes to Christ, but outside of that, I can use it. If I took a hard line stand like a lot of God's people do and just ranted and raved on Christmas and preached everything against it and all those things, you would never reach anybody because you would look so weird compared to the world. I may have to be in this world, but I am not of this world. But I have to use sometimes things that are in this world because if you do not, you will never reach anybody, but you have to be smarter than the problem. You have to understand why things are the way they are.

### III. The Gifts of God vs. The Gifts of Santa

Today I want to compare, and I know we all have gifts under the tree today. Probably somebody already opened them, but I want to come in, and again, I think it is great. I am glad that you do that. I am not preaching against that at all, but I want to make a comparison today, and I want you to leave with a better understanding about some things because I want to compare the gifts of Santa that everybody gets excited about with the gifts that God gave us that nobody gets excited about. These gifts are totally lost to God's people today. As a child of God, I do not set aside one day to recognize Christ coming into the world. I thank God every day of my life that He came and died for me because we would not have what we have. We will talk about that in a little bit if it was not for what He did.

### IV. The Gift of the Holy Spirit

Let me talk about the first gift. The first gift that He gave us was the gift of the Holy Spirit.

*> If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?*

If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children. Now we say they are evil as far as being a sinner, not that you are an evil person, but in a sinful state like we are. If He then, what He is saying, if you in an evil state know how to give good gifts to your children because you love them, how much more shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit unto them that ask Him? The first gift that God gave us was the Holy Spirit of God.

Acts chapter 2, the coming of the Holy Spirit of God to indwell believers, changed the world completely. The world was never the same again. Once the Holy Spirit of God came, it separated the Old Testament from the New Testament. It separated what God was doing with His marvelous people, the nation of Israel, that He is doing with the church. When the Holy Spirit of God came, it was God's gift to man. It was the greatest gift that had ever showed up on this planet.

John chapter 16, if you do not know this already, most of you probably do, is the definitive chapter in the Bible on the Holy Spirit of God. It tells you the seven things that the Holy Spirit of God will do for you.

1. He says it reproves the world of sin. It tells the world that there is sin in this world, and it lets you and I know that we are sinners.
2. The second thing, it reproves the world of righteousness. That is Jesus Christ. It shows us, first of all, that there is sin, but it shows us that there is a righteousness, and that is Christ.
3. The third thing He says, it reproves the world of judgment. That simply means that He lets the world know that someday God is going to hold us accountable for our sins.
4. The fourth one comes to you and me. After you get saved, after you recognize that the world is reproved of sin and you look to God's righteousness and you understand God's judgment and you trust Christ as your own personal Savior, the Holy Spirit of God indwells inside you, and now it will lead and guide you to all truth.
5. The next one, it will show you prophecy.
6. The sixth one, it will glorify the Lord Jesus Christ.
7. The seventh one, it will show you in your life what is right and what is wrong so you never have to make a bad choice again.

That is a pretty good gift. If I would give you a gift today and you take it home and you would open it up and it was a little electronic thing about the size of an iPhone that all you had to do was ask it the question, "Should I do this or should I not do this? Is this a good deal or a bad deal?" And that little thing would come up like a little, you know, remember that old eight ball we used to have where we used to ask it a question and hold it up and it would give you the same answer? It would show up the answer and say, "Do it, don't do it, this is what you need to do, this is what you don't need to do." You think that would be a pretty amazing gift? Well, I have to tell you something, when He gave you the Holy Spirit of God as a gift, He gave you that ability, and in that Book, you can do that, and He will tell you.

## V. The Gift of Salvation

The second gift is the gift of salvation through the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, the miracle, the new birth.

*> Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.*

I stand here this morning with all of the presents we all have under the trees and all the excitement that we think about Christ in His coming, as the world looks at it, and nobody ever gets excited about the fact that if it would not be for Him, we would all be headed for hell this morning. The gift of God's Son, the gift of God's salvation to us, and the gift of what we are and have the ability to give back to Him.

One of my favorite verses in the Bible is found in 1 Corinthians 8:3, where it says, "If any man loved God, the same is known of him." I think that is one of the most profound, telling verses in all the Bible because it states a lot of things that are true that are not necessarily found in the verse, and one of them is the fact that if you love God, it shows because love, true love, will

always identify itself with the object. It always will, and true love will always identify it with the object in question. So if you really do love God, it shows.

When you love somebody, you do things for somebody. When you love somebody, you do things for them, you give them things, you unconditionally love them, you help them, you do things for them, you give them things. Yet the Bible says, "If any man loved God, the same is known of him." He gave you some gifts, and we are talking about those this morning, but what gifts have we given back to Him? You never want to teach your kids, and the old saying is, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." That becomes true when you turn 25. Up to that point, it is not very true. You like to receive that, I get it. But the bottom line is this, we as God's people take so much from God, and most of us give so very little back.

If any man loved God, the same is known of him. You give things to people that you love today. You really do. You do not quibble about it; you do not think twice about it. You simply know that they love this and they want this, and you want to be something special to them because you love them, so you give to them unconditionally. That is what God wants with us. The second gift was the gift of salvation. God did not hesitate about going to the cross for you and for me. God never hesitated about sending His Son down to die for you and for me. God wanted us to have this gift so desperately that He never even thought twice about it. Yet I find people, at a time when it comes after they get saved, to serve God, to do something for God, they have to pray about it. They have to think about it. "Well, I have to ponder, though." No, He never took and hesitated for a moment when He saw my need. I never want to hesitate in a moment when I see a need that God has that I can do something for Him. What a great gift that was.

## VI. The Gift of the Church

The third gift was the gift of the church.

- > *I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called,*
- > *With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;*
- > *Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*
- > *There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;*
- > *One Lord, one faith, one baptism,*
- > *One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.*
- > *But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.*
- > *Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.*
- > *(Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?*

- > *He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.)*
- > *And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;*
- > *For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:*
- > *Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:*
- > *That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;*
- > *But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:*
- > *From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.*
- > *This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind,*
- > *Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart:*
- > *Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.*
- > *But ye have not so learned Christ;*
- > *If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus:*
- > *That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts;*
- > *And be renewed in the spirit of your mind;*
- > *And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.*

He says in Ephesians 4:8 that He goes down into the center of the earth, He dies, and then He rises the third day, and the Bible says He goes back to heaven. It says in Ephesians 4:8 that He gives gifts unto men. When you read that chapter, you will find that there are four gifts that He gave to the church directly as the structure that God wanted it to be to establish it.

8. He says first of all, He gave the apostles. You will find those in Matthew 10.
9. Second, the gift that He gave was the prophets. You will find those in Acts 11.
10. Then He says He gave evangelists. You will find that in Acts 8 and 9.

11. The fourth thing He finds, He says, is pastors and teachers. You will find that in Timothy, Titus, and Philemon.

Ephesians 4:11-12 says that He gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ. Those are gifts that He gave to the church. He gave these gifts to the church to establish the church, to bring the church to where God wanted it to be, that you and I, through the gift of the church, could be perfected for the spiritual work that God has called us to do. That is what He did.

Somebody says, "When did the church start?" When you look at it in the Bible, if you put it into a Bible context, there are four stages. It was not like the Old Testament ended on Monday and the New Testament started on Tuesday. There was literally, as God always does, God transitions everything that He does. God transitioned the church through four stages as you come through the Bible. I would say that the church was called out in Matthew 10. There are your apostles. But the church goes into effect at the death of Christ because Hebrews says that the New Testament does not take over until the death of the testator. So that would be the death of Christ. There would be your prophets. But it is not in power until the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. There would be your evangelists. Then it is revealed to the world through the life of those evangelists, and it produces pastors and teachers. There is Paul. There is Philip. Everybody thinks that Paul was a pastor. Paul was not a pastor. He was an evangelist. But he trained young men to become pastors, and that would be in your Bible: Philemon, Timothy, and Titus. So we begin to see that God gave you and me the gift of the church.

This church is here for a purpose. Somebody says, "Well, you do not have to go to church to be a Christian." No, that may be true, but you need to go to church to be a good Christian. You need to go to church to be perfected as a Christian. The Bible says, "Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is." The Bible says that Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it. It always amazed me that God's people never love the things that God loves, always love the things that God does not love, and yet still pretend or call themselves a Christian. The Bible says, "If any man loved God, the same is known of him." One of the things that you want to mark yourself with is the fact that if you love God, you will love the things that He loves. The Bible says that Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it. It is just that simple.

## VII. The Gift of the Word of God

The fourth gift was the gift of the Word of God.

*> For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost,*

It talks about somebody having tasted of the heavenly gift. I know that when you got saved, your life changed. I know that because the Holy Spirit of God came in, and He made all the difference in your life. I know that when you get into a New Testament Bible teaching church, I know that that can change your life too. It is all designed by God as gifts given to us. But I want you to know something. All those things are good, and all those things are great, but all those things

were basically, all those gifts were given to point you and help you with the most impressive gift outside of the Lord Jesus Christ that God ever gave you. That is the Word of God.

The Word of God, when God gave it to you, is the most incredible Book that the world has ever seen. I am telling you, it is God's supernatural gift to you and me. A Book that you can hold in your hand that is absolute and perfect and really is the complete mind of God in every way, shape, or form. I tell people all the time that when Christ went back to heaven, He replaced Himself with three things.

12. The first thing He replaced Himself with was the Holy Spirit of God. That is the leading guidance into all truth.
13. The second He replaced Himself with was the church.
14. The third thing He replaced Himself with was the Word of God.

The Word of God is given to you and me that we might know what God wants us to do. The greatest attack anywhere on the planet today has always been and always will be against the Word of God. If the devil can get you out of the Bible, he has you. If the devil can get you to quit reading your Bible, quit believing your Bible, and quit making that Bible the number one thing in your life, you will not stay in church very long. You may not go right back to the world, but in time you will, but you will live in that la-la land of the twilight zone where you do not do anything for God, think about anything for God, and you just mesmerize yourself that you are somewhere in a twilight zone of Christianity which does not exist. That Bible is key in your life.

What would it make you feel like? Some of you, bless your heart, you came in today, you gave me a present. I appreciate that. Not necessary, but thank you very much. I am really interested to open up one of them that is really heavy back there. It is probably, I am really interested in that one, but I shook it, and it did not do anything. It weakened my arms; it is so heavy, but anyway. What would you feel like if somebody brought you a gift and said, "Hey, you know what, it is Christmas. I really, really appreciate all that you do, and I appreciate all you have been in my life, and this is just a little something special that I wanted to give you. I love you and thank you for all you do, and here is a little something just for you."

Now you went to great lengths. I mean, obviously, in your conversation and your thought process, you thought about this. It was not something you walked down this aisle and said, "Oh, I will just get that for so and so." You thought it through. How would you feel if you gave that person that gift and that person looked at it and said, "Ah, no thanks." That would ruin your day unless there was something you really wanted anyhow, then you would be happy, you would take it for yourself. That is how I look at it. But that is what so many of God's people do with the gift of the Word of God that God gives them. That is exactly what so many of God's people do when it comes to these gifts. God brings it to them. God gives it to them. We get more excited about what is under the tree this morning and the concept of the world's concept of Christianity and Christmas than we do with the real meaning of Christian at Christmas that brings all these things into focus in our lives.

The very fact that God, I wonder when we get to the judgment seat of Christ. Down through the history of the church, there have been literally hundreds and thousands of people who have paid

with their own lives, their family's lives. Moms and dads who were separated from their kids. Kids that were separated from their parents. Kids that were tortured in front of their parents, all to get them to deny the very Book that you hold in your hand. I understand that those people knew what they had, and I understand that those people loved it. They loved it enough to die for it. It is hard to imagine that me as a father, and probably you as a parent, how you can let your child that you love so dearly and so desperately suffer the anguish of torture when all you have to do is deny a Book that is just a Book. But you see, to those people, it was not just a Book; it was the Word of God. They understood some great things about suffering and what they had to go through.

I look back at the Waldensians and the Albigensians and the Huguenots and all those people who paid such a horrific price for what they believed and to keep their Bible. I understand that they were in a time period where they had to make a choice, and it was a capital offense back at that point to have the Bible that you have in your lap today. But you realize that someday you are going to have to stand shoulder to shoulder with them at the judgment seat of Christ. You realize that I know that they did it because they loved God. I know that they did it because they knew it was the Word of God, but you also know that you would not have the Bible you have today if they would not pay the price for what they had. You realize it was their understanding that gift of God was to them, and they deeply understood that if they did not hold the line and do what they needed to do, that gift would probably never get to you.

Let us ask you a question. Let us say that Christ does not come for another thousand years, and five, six, seven, eight hundred years from now, somebody else, would they have the Bible based on your price they are willing to pay for it? It is a gift, man. The greatest gift. The miracle of the Word of God. A Book that will supernaturally transform you into the person of Christ that He wants you to be.

I have always looked at this, the thing that makes the Word of God so special is that in the world you can go to school, you can go to a tech school, or you can go to a seminar, and you can get information, you can get informed. You can go hanging out with your people, your friends, and they will conform you. So the world will inform you, and it will conform you. You can do some things that are wrong, and somebody will get a hold of you, and they will try to reform you. When I was growing up, the places where they put young incorrigible kids, they do not call them this anymore, but they were called reform schools, and kids that were headed for the prison, they put them in the reform school. You know why? Because the world system wanted to reform them. So the world can inform you, it can conform you, it can reform you, it can mission form you, but only the Bible can transform you. That is because it is God's gift; it is a supernatural gift from God.

Everybody today wants to make the Bible on par with just the other books in the world. Even in religion today, we find that people talk about the Bible just being another book or being full of mistakes or having errors in it. Man has an insatiable desire to bring the greatest gift that God ever gave to man outside His Son, the Word of God, which is a copy of His mind, bring it down to man's level just like any other book that anybody else wrote. The miracle of the Word of God to our life, giving us through the supernatural Word of God the ability to see God in His ways

that are past finding out, to understand Him. If you will love the Word of God and get into the Word of God, it will do for you what no other book on this planet will do for you. The fact that God takes us, you and me, and takes your life and my life into the supernatural where you will be able to do things that ordinarily nobody would ever be able to do. Where you will be able to accomplish things that only people ever dream about. It requires no education; it requires no money.

You have people who spend all their life going to school, getting education so they can reach some goal in their life of some great thing, and there is nothing wrong with that. You will find that there are people that have all kinds of money; they will buy everything they can to try to get them what they want to do in life, and there is nothing wrong with that. But when it comes to you becoming everything that God wants you to be and becoming, you getting to do what God wants you to do, none of those things count. All you have to do is receive the gift of the Word of God.

I have often thought of my own life, and I look around in the lives of others, and I think that is the best way to do it. The things the Bible does for you when you believe it:

15. The first one is believing the Word of God to be infallible. When you believe that the Word of God is infallible, when you embrace your life to it, that it is the infallible Word of God, then it will give you the ability to hear the inaudible. You will be able to hear things that other people cannot hear. You will be able to hear things that God just misses. You will be able to read your Bible, and you will hear things, and God will speak through that Book, or you will hear somebody speak, and you will understand exactly what they are saying because when you believe the infallible, you will hear the inaudible.
16. When you believe the infallible and you hear the inaudible, I will tell you the next thing you do, you will see the invisible. You will see what nobody else sees. You will be like Abraham who called those things that were not as though they were. You will be able to see and look at a person or a situation, and where the world just sees this person or that girl or that guy or this scenario, you see it from God's standpoint and completely understand what God is trying to do.
17. Believing the infallible, you will hear the inaudible, you will see the invisible, and you will touch the intangible. Touching somebody else's life. You, as a human being, touching the life of somebody else through the Word of God and changing the course and the direction of their life. Bringing them into the conformability of the Word of God and helping them be everything that God wants them to be.
18. Believing the infallible Word of God, hearing the inaudible, seeing the invisible, touching the intangible will all bring you to the place in the Word of God in your life that you will wind up doing the impossible. You will do what nobody else can do. God will take you and use you wherever you want to go to do whatever He calls for you to do.

We all know about D.L. Moody. D.L. Moody was the greatest evangelist, preacher, conference speaker probably in the 1800s. He was an incredible guy. Preached incredibly. God used him in a credible way, and here is a man who literally to this day there are thousands of books written about him. His sermons are written out, and you can read them. In his day, every time he preached on Sunday, the Chicago Times printed his entire sermon in the newspaper the next day.

What a man that reached the world. He went to England. He went around the world. He preached everywhere. God used him in a mighty way, and everybody knows the name of D.L. Moody.

Nobody knows the name of Edward Kimball. Edward Kimball was a Sunday school teacher that won Moody to Christ. Moody worked in a shoe store, and he went to church one day, and he wound up in Edward Kimball's Sunday School class, and Edward Kimball saw in him something that he did not see in himself, and he stopped by. He stopped by the shoe store one day with a burden on his heart to ask D.L. Moody if he knew the Lord Jesus Christ as his own personal Savior, and he won him to Christ that day. There is a man that nobody even knows his name, knows who he is, who won to Christ one of the greatest men that ever walked this planet for the cause of Christ and preaching the Word of God, and everybody knows his name. You know what old Edward Kimball did? He did the impossible. He did the impossible. God will take you and use you if you receive this gift. God will take you and use you in a way that is unbelievable.

## VIII. The Gift of Individual Spiritual Gifts

Let us talk about the fifth gift. This will be found in 1 Corinthians 12, 13, and 14. These will be the individual spiritual gifts that God gives to you to do His work. There is much confusion today about spiritual gifts; there really is. Most people do not understand it. Most people think that there is like the charismatic crowd, that it is some kind of spiritual thing that you get, that you have to pray for and all those things, and of course, that is not true. The real confusion lies in the fact that the spiritual gifts in the Bible fall into three categories. If you do not separate those three categories, then you are in trouble.

19. The first category is spiritual gifts will be in 2 Corinthians 12:12. It is called sign gifts. They are the only ones that go to the nation of Israel. The church does not get those.
20. Then you have the gifts to the church in Ephesians 4:8. That will be deacons, pastors, and the offices of the church and what they do.
21. The third one will be the gifts to individual Christians to do the work of God, and this will be found in 1 Corinthians 12, 13, and 14 also.

These are gifts to empower you to His work. This one for you and me is the ability to have whatever we need to have to grow to be what God wants us to do, and there is a lot of confusion about it today. Churches are so far outside the concept of the Bible and the Word of God that they have no idea how the spiritual gifts work. The standard teaching is that every Christian has a main spiritual gift and then a couple secondary gifts, and your life is defined by what that main gift is. There are even churches that some guy put together that you take the gift test, spiritual gift test, and they ask you your favorite color, what kind of dogs you like, and all those things, and out of that you get a little readout by your marking the things, and you go to the graph, and it tells you, "Well, this is probably your main gift, and this is probably this, and this is probably that."

I always ask those guys this question, "What was Christ's main gift?" He was the embodiment and the power of everything that God was. How do you have a main gift and a secondary gift when your goal in life clearly in the Word of God is to become more like Christ every day of

your life? You know what spiritual gifts are to you and me? They are simply this: God has them all. When you become like Christ and you get into the Word of God and you receive the gift that God has given you and you begin to grow in the Word of God, whatever God calls you to do, He empowers you with whatever gifts you need to get the job done. That is how it works. You can save taking a test. Do not worry about it.

## IX. The Gift of the Body of Christ

The last gift, and this gift is really because of the other five. This gift will be the true friend that God has given us in our walk and our relationship with Christ, the body of Christ. In ministry, and it is so true, maybe you do not see it if you have just been saved a short time. But when you look at things in a long protracted scale of 30, 40 years in ministry, it becomes so true. It is the old concept or adage that in any church, in any ministry, in any situation, people come and people go. The beauty of all of this gift is the fact that God will bring people together who understand the ministry, who understand the church, who understand the work, and they realize what God has done for them and what God has given to them, and then they invest the rest of their life giving back to God what He has given to them.

I know to me it is an amazing thing. Now I love you all very much, and I know that, and I look at you as God's gift to this church. But you realize that if it was not for Christ, none of us would be together this morning. We all were going our own ways in life. You were doing your thing. I was doing mine. You were busy in your world with your career and what you wanted to accomplish or what you wanted to do as I was. Because of the hand of God and the love of God and the fact that God loved us, God reached down and took your group path over here, my path over here, this path over here, and this path over here and put us all together. He gave us the gift of each other for the work of the ministry.

As I said, in ministry and churches, people come and people go. It is just the way it is. But you will find that God will build men and women who understand what the work is all about. But God, through the gifts that He gave unto men, puts us together for the good work. I know some of you are young here, and you have been in a church for a year, and you are doing great. I love you. I know that from what you are already showing, you will be around for a long time. You love the Book. You love the Lord. But you know what is absolutely precious to me as a gift? It is those who have been in this church for five years, 10 years, 15, 20 years, 25 years, some of you 30 years. You have been faithful all of those years. You saw and understood what God was doing. You recognized the gifts that God gave you. You were smart enough to understand that you were God's gift to this church. Because of that, we are God's gift to each other. We are family.

The greatest gift that comes out of all of the other five gifts is us. That God in His sovereign knowledge looked down through eternity, and He saw everybody where they were, and He decided to handpick you to put you here. He could have put you anywhere. I really believe, honestly, I believe that people blow through any church. It happens at every church. I believe that some come through that the devil brings through to cause problems. We do not hardly ever have any of that, but it happens in churches all the time. Then I believe that God brings people in to say, "Okay, here is your chance to have everything that you want. I am going to give you the

gifts." Just like that person that you give the gift to that said, "No thanks," some of God's people say to God, "No thanks." The beauty of you that makes you so special to this church is the fact that you took the gift that God gave you and you did something with it. It is just that simple.

We see through those friendships, the spiritual gift knitted together by the things that God has done for all of us. We never take Him for granted. Today, under your Christmas tree, when you go home or even this morning, you will find an array and assortment of gifts. Some will be clothes. Some will be electronic gadgets. Some will be books. Some will be toys. Each gift will not only have a special meaning, but it will have a special purpose. You go home today and you open up your presents, you are going to say, "Oh, that is a beautiful tie. I like that shirt. Oh, I got an iPhone or this or that, or I got this and I got that." Every one of them will be different. Every one of them will serve a different purpose, but every one of them will be special because somebody gave them to you that loves you.

When I look at this church, as I look at each one of you as God's gift to this ministry, to me, I see the same thing. Every one of you is unique in your own way. Every one of you is special. I do not care if you just got saved last week. I do not care if you have been around for 25 years. I do not care if you have been here for 10 years. Everybody in this church is special simply because of the fact that you are God's gift to this ministry. Just like every gift that you have under your tree at home has a different purpose and a different meaning, every one of you has a different purpose, a different aspect of this church that you are going to bring to it. Some of you have an incredible ability to do this. Somebody else to do this. Everybody pulling together. In each case, it is because you just took and received the gifts that God has given to us and realized the price that was paid for those gifts, and now you want to take those gifts and you want to give back to God the gifts that He wants.

Because there is something that God wants today. You realize the gift of this church. You realize the gift of the Word of God and the gift of the Holy Spirit of God. You realize the gift of your salvation, and now you want to give back to God what He loves and wants the most. This is what it means in Acts 13:2 where it talked about those early Christians were ministering unto the Lord. You can minister for God, but ministering to Him is simply finding out what He wants and then giving that to Him. The gift of our life back to Him based on the gift of His life for you and for me.

I want to tell you something. You are all special this morning, and I know there is a host of people not here today that would be here on a normal Sunday. They are either out of town or whatever, but you make this church everything that it is because you are the final gift that God has given this ministry. This ministry could not go on without you. The older I get, the less abilities I have, and the more you pick up those abilities and the more you do. That is the way it is supposed to be, and that is the real meaning of Christ coming. That is the real meaning of His coming to this Earth. It was not the fact that He was born in a stable someplace as a baby and the wise men came and the star of Bethlehem and Herod wanted to kill Him and all that. That is not the main emphasis. It is not the fact that He came down and the angel sang, "Glory to God in the highest." That is not the main event. The main event, He came down for you.

He came down because in His infinite wisdom He saw down through history every one of you struggling in your life where you were, and then God found you. He saw you in your desperate hour of need when nobody else in the world cared. When your family may have forsaken you, your friends left you, you had put yourself in terrible situations, and you were on the brink of losing everything and a disaster in your life, and then you looked up, and there was a hand that pulled you out of the miry pit that you were in because He loves you. Because you, at that moment in salvation when you did not know it, you did not understand it, you had no clue. God was looking at you, and He says, "You are a gift I am going to give Bob Alexander an old past Baptist church. You are exactly what he needs. You are exactly what that church needs. You will get it. You will hang on to it. You will hold the line, and you will be profitable for Me and him in the ministry." Through the sovereign knowledge of Almighty God, through the events that none of us could explain, but we can stand here and talk about it all day long. He brought our paths together through a volleyball game, a softball game. He was showing me who had been with me 30 years ago, we were separated, and then God marvelously puts us all back together again. That is what He does. That is what He does because He recognizes that the greatest gift of this church and the greatest gift to me that comes out of these other five is you, and whatever I have under the tree this morning pales in comparison to what I have here today because all that is temporal. All this is eternal.

When we leave here today, let us recognize one thing: the great God of heaven chose you to be here because of what He wants us to do, and you are you. Every individual here is a special gift to this church that needs to be here to do everything that God wants us to do, and I am telling you, it is just that simple. The day in history that changed the world forever, the day in our lives that changed you and me forever and brought us all together for this work that God has called us to do. People come and people go, but you here today in this church that represent the bond that we have to give back as a body together. The things that God wants our family here together. You are the special gift that makes this church special to the Lord. It would be nothing without you. It is not about me. It is about what God has done through the Word of God and what you have responded to, and this is what makes this church special to the Lord. It is you. He gave gifts to us because He loves us. We give the gift of ourselves back to Him because we love Him, because "If any man loved God, the same is known of him." Now that is the real meaning of Christmas. That is the real bottom line of what Christmas is, and I want you to go home, open up your presents, do not throw your tree out in the yard, do not take the presents back. Enjoy your day with your family, but remember the greatest family that God has ever given you is the one that you supernaturally were born into.

Let us pray. Father, we do thank You and praise You for the Lord Jesus, and we do love You. We ask You now, Father, Your blessings upon all that we endeavor to do. Be with those who travel today. Be with those, Father, that are here with their families. We pray, Father, that You will just take care and watch over and give us everything that we need. Thank You for the gifts that You have given to us, and thank You for the precious gift of these dear people to this church and to me. Thank You for