

Three Christmas Presents

Ponder this remarkable situation with me. If the Son of God came to help you stop sinning—to destroy the works of the devil—and if he also came to die so that when you do sin, there is a propitiation, a removal of God’s wrath, then what does this imply for living your life?

Three things. And they are wonderful to have. I give them to you briefly as Christmas presents.

Gift 1: A Clear Purpose for Living

The first implication is that you have a clear purpose for living. Negatively, it is simply this: don’t sin—don’t do what dishonors God. “I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin” (1 John 2:1). “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8).

If you ask, “Can you give us that positively, instead of negatively?” the answer is: “Yes, it’s all summed up in

1 John 3:23.” It’s a great summary of what John’s whole letter requires. Notice the singular “commandment”—“And this is his *commandment*, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us.” These two things are so closely connected for John that he calls them one commandment: believe Jesus and love others. That is your purpose. That is the sum of the Christian life. Trusting Jesus and loving people the way Jesus and his apostles taught us to love. Trust Jesus, love people. There’s the first gift, a purpose to live.

Gift 2: Hope That Our Failures Will Be Forgiven

The second implication of the twofold truth that Christ came to destroy our sinning and to forgive our sins is this: we make progress in overcoming our sin when we have hope that our failures will be forgiven. If you don’t have hope that God will forgive your failures, when you start fighting sin, you give up.

Many of you are pondering some changes in the new year because you have fallen into sinful patterns and want out. You want some new patterns of eating. New patterns for entertainment. New patterns of giving. New patterns of relating to your spouse. New patterns of family devotions. New patterns of sleep and exercise.

New patterns of courage in witness. But you are struggling, wondering whether it's any use. Well, here's your second Christmas present: Christ not only came to destroy the works of the devil, our sinning; he also came to be an advocate for us because of experiences of failure in our fight.

So I plead with you, let the fact that failure will not have the last word give you the hope to fight. But beware! If you turn the grace of God into license, and say, "Well, if I can fail, and it doesn't matter, then why bother fighting sin?"—if you say that, and mean it, and go on acting on it, you are probably not born again and should tremble.

But that is not where most of you are. Most of you want to fight sinful patterns in your life. And what God is saying to you is this: let Christ's covering of your failure give you hope to fight. "I write this to you that you might not sin, but if you sin you have an advocate, Jesus Christ."

Gift 3: Christ Will Help Us

Finally, the third implication of the double truth that Christ came to destroy our sinning and to forgive our sins is this: Christ will really *help* us in our fight. He really will help you. He is on your side. He didn't come to destroy sin because sin is fun. He came to destroy sin because sin is fatal. It is

a deceptive work of the devil, and it will destroy us if we don't fight it. He came to help us, not hurt us.

So here's your third Christmas present: Christ will help overcome sin in you. First John 4:4 says, "He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world." Jesus is alive, Jesus is almighty, Jesus lives in us by faith. And Jesus is for us, not against us. He will help you in your fight with sin in the new year. Trust him.