

THE GIFT YOU CANNOT RETURN

Romans 11:29: For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.

Romans 11:30: For as ye in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief:

Romans 11:31: Even so have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy.

Romans 11:32: For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all.

Today is December 26, the day after Christmas. For the past several weeks' people have been at the malls and the stores trying to find a gift for someone they know and possibly love. They search through the stores looking for something to give. My wife and I went to a store that sells scented soaps and candles. The sales lady met us as we were walking in and told us about some sales that were occurring in the store. As she left I turned to my wife and mimicked her style to say, "And over here we have our gifts of desperation collection." At this time of year you find the stores packed with trinkets and do-dads that you never see at any other time of the year. They are gift ideas for those people for whom you have no idea what to buy, when you become desperate to find some sort of gift. They are gifts of desperation.

One year someone got me a small "executive dartboard" for my desk. It was a 6-inch piece of cork and some small darts. I suppose the idea was that I would put this on my desk and play darts when I was bored. More than that, though, the gift told me that the giver had no idea what to get me for Christmas, but she felt like she had to give me something.

It is this attitude that “any gift is better than no gift” that makes December 26 one of the busiest days in the stores. People flock to the stores on the day after Thanksgiving to get in on those deals that last from 6AM to 9AM only. They flock to the stores again on December 26 to return all of the junk that they got.

Why do we do this? Why do we feel obligated to give people something that they don't need? What does it mean to truly give someone a gift? It turns out that there is a field of research into what they call a “gift economy.”

In a market economy people exchange items of approximately equal value. There is a give and take, an equal partnering in a transaction. A barter economy allows people to maintain certain anonymity with each other. I don't know you and you don't know me. But you have something I want, I have something that you want, so we exchange. The converse of this transaction is something we call the “gift exchange.” That is, I hear that you are giving something to me so I hurriedly try and find something for you. We have even taken this to ridiculous conclusions such as “anonymous gift exchanges” where we all agree to spend \$20 and then we raffle off the gifts to someone at random. We create these forced business transactions and then call it a “gift.”

What is a true gift? In order for something to truly be a gift, it has to have the following characteristics:

1. A gift is given out of the abundance of the giver
2. The giver expects nothing but thanks from the receiver
3. A gift can be offered but cannot be requested
4. A gift can be accepted or rejected

1. A gift is given out of the abundance of the giver

Luke 12:16: The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully:

Luke 12:17: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?

Luke 12:18: And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods.

Luke 12:19: And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.

In a capitalist of market-based economy, what this man did is perfectly sensible. He invests his time and his labor into his field and his investments pay off. He decides that he can take it easy for a few years. He decides to sit back and just live off the huge amount of money he just made.

If we were to update this parable we would say that the man was working on his Internet business. One day he got a call from Google offering to buy him out for billions of dollars. He says to himself, "I'll never have to work again in my life. I am going to buy a big house and retire."

Luke 12:20: But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?

Many scholars feel that the "sin" committed by this man is that he decided to hoard his wealth rather than share it with others. In God's economy he should have taken his extra crops and given them away to the poor and needy. Rather than put the extra into a barn, he should have turned the extra into a gift and given it away.

There are other examples of this in the Bible.

Leviticus 23:22: And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not make clean riddance of the corners of thy field when thou reapest, neither shalt thou gather any gleaning of thy harvest: thou shalt leave them unto the poor, and to the stranger: I am the LORD your God.

So the Lord says that he will provide for you. Any extra that the Lord provides should be left for others. By taking everything that the man had and keeping it for

himself, he was violating the economy that God set up. In God's economy we should take what we need and give the rest to people who have not.

A gift comes from the abundance of the giver. Likewise the abundance of the giver should become a gift to others.

2. The giver expects nothing but thanks from the receiver

Since the abundance comes from God, it stands to reason that the giver should not expect to receive anything tangible back from the one who receives the gift. If anything the giver will receive thanks and some status from the receiver but nothing of value.

This effect is seen today in places like scientific research. Someone creates a theory and puts it out for everyone else to see. Other people see that theory and they build on it. The original creator of the theory does not receive any money for his discovery. Instead the only thing he gets is the status of having been the first person to come up with the theory. Just a few weeks ago two physicists, Andrew Cleland and John Martinis from the University of California at Santa Barbara, were able to prove that an object can exist in two places at the same time, (This is being heralded by some as the scientific breakthrough of the year.) but if you look at the coverage in the papers, you do not see the names of these scientists until the 9th paragraph of the article. Most of the article talks about Albert Einstein.

Einstein was right, you can be in two places at once

By Steve Connor, Science Editor

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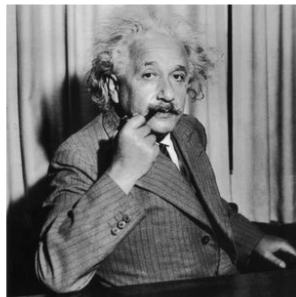
A device that exists in two different states at the same time, and coincidentally proves that Albert Einstein was right when he thought he was wrong, has been named as the scientific breakthrough of the year.

The machine, consisting of a sliver of wafer-thin metal, is the first man-made device to be governed by the mysterious quantum forces that operate at the level of atoms and sub-atomic [particles](#).

Normal, everyday objects obey the laws of conventional Newtonian physics, named after Sir Isaac Newton, but these rules break down on the sub-atomic scale and a whole new branch of theoretical physics had to be invented to explain what happens on this sub-microscopic level.

Einstein was the first to embrace quantum physics but later rejected it on the grounds that it made everything unpredictable – "God does not play dice with the universe," he famously stated.

However, a range of effects has been recorded over the past few years that can only be explained by quantum mechanics and in March scientists were able to build the first device that seemed to follow the quantum rules that Einstein was the first



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Einstein famously rejected quantum theory as unable to explain the universe

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Einstein gets no money from the use of any of his scientific theories. He gets status and recognition, but he gets nothing tangible. This is something else that makes a gift a gift: the person giving the gift expects nothing in return except for thanks and gratitude.

Proverbs 19:6: Many will intreat the favour of the prince: and every man is a friend to him that giveth gifts

In another place it talks about people bringing gifts to King David and Solomon. Why did they bring gifts? Why to win the respect of the king.

3. A gift can be offered but cannot be requested

Since the gift comes from the extra that someone else has, you cannot request that a gift be given to you. There is no going to Santa Clause and asking for a gift. The giver must offer the gift because it is what they want to do. The gift must be given with joy. The gift must be given because the giver feels that it is right. If the one receiving the gift pesters the giver into giving, then it is not really a free will gift. A gift signifies the intent of the one giving. One can give great amounts of money but do so out of a sense of obligation or fear of embarrassment. On the other hand someone else may give a small amount simply because they have a desire to do so.

Leviticus 22:23: Either a bullock or a lamb that hath anything superfluous or lacking in his parts, that mayest thou offer for a freewill offering; but for a vow it shall not be accepted.

A freewill offering need not be perfect.

4. A gift can be accepted or rejected

When someone offers a gift it can be accepted or rejected. Once it has been accepted, it cannot be returned. Once rejected it cannot be accepted.

Matthew 22:2: The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son,

Matthew 22:3: And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come.

Matthew 22:4: Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage.

Matthew 22:5: But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise:

This king has made an offer of a gift to some guests. He offers them the gift of eating at his table at the wedding of his son. But the guests reject the offer of the king, so the king pulls back the offer and gives the offer to someone else.

Matthew 22:8: Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy.

Matthew 22:9: Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage.

Matthew 22:10: So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests.

These new guests did accept the king's gift. They were not able to eat at the king's table on their own. The gift that the king offered them is something that they could never get for themselves. They access the king's table and the king expects nothing from them in return except their gratitude.

Matthew 22:11: And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment:

Matthew 22:12: And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless.

Matthew 22:13: Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

This man tried to accept the king's invitation after it had been rejected. But the king had pulled back his invitation; the man was no longer invited. The gift is freely given and as such it is automatically un-gifted if it is rejected. The receiver cannot take the gift; the gift must be offered again.

The Gift

I have spoken for several minutes about what it means to give a gift, the obligations of the giver as well as the receiver. But what is the gift that God has given us this day?

Romans 5:15: But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many.

All of us were born into sin. All of us have the natural instinct to commit sin. We are greedy, lustful, and harmful to ourselves, harmful to others. As much as we might like to be perfect, we are not able to be perfect on our own.

A gift must be offered out of the abundance of the giver. God is perfect. He offers to you some of the perfection. You cannot be perfect on your own, but God has plenty of perfection to share. He offers it as a gift to you.

A gift must be given without expectation. God knows that you are unable to give perfection, wealth, or any other thing because he needs nothing. The only thing that God asks from us is our praise. Our praise is the one thing that God does not own. Just like any other gift, the giving of thanks is the only thing that the giver expects in return.

A gift can be offered, but cannot be requested. For many generations mankind tried to be good enough to gain God's approval, but without success. God is offering his grace as a gift to you. He holds that gift out and says that if you want it, he will give it to you. It is nothing that you are able to get on your own.

A gift can be accepted or rejected. The offer is being extended to you. The Lord holds out the gift for you. You can accept the gift his grace and mercy, or you can reject it. The Lord holds out His hands of Grace as long as you live and breathe. Once you have breathed you last, however, the rejection stays. Like the people at the king's feast once the offer has been rejected, there is no redemption.

On this December 26, the day of gift returns, the Lord holds out the offer of Grace once again. Will you accept it?