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“No Strings Attached”

Dear Friend,

As a child, I always loved Christmas time, because I knew my parents would be buying me gifts. I especially enjoyed ripping off the paper to see what was inside. When Christmas morning finally arrived, in a matter of minutes those beautifully wrapped gifts transformed into piles of torn paper and boxes with toys spread all over the floor.

I never thought; “Gee, I wonder what I did to deserve all these gifts?” Nor did I ever think, “How long will I get to keep these toys before I have to give them back?” I knew my parents loved me and because they gave me these gifts they were mine to keep. They didn’t give them to me so they could take them back or use them to manipulate me. My parents never said; “Mark, give me back all those gifts because you’re not doing what I want you to do!”

A gift is defined as something given willingly to someone without payment, with no “strings attached”. (*Just to be clear, we are not talking about “gifts” as is defined by Paul in I Corinthians 12*) The best example of what is by far the greatest “Gift” of all is the gift of Jesus Christ given by God to humanity.

God gave the greatest gift to redeem mankind out of spiritual death and into HIS family. God’s motivation for giving Jesus to humanity was pure love. Not humanistic love, which is selfish and self-centered and only interested in “what’s in it for me.” God’s love, as is defined by I Corinthians 13, is love that is focused on the other person and not self.

God’s gift to mankind was motivated by love and rooted in a desire to bless mankind. (John 3:16)

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

The motivation behind the gift was selfless with no strings attached. We don't have to be afraid that one day God is going to decide to take our salvation from us because maybe He feels we aren't grateful enough for what He gave us. Or, what about those of us who are preachers? We don't have to worry about God ever saying; "Mark you're a lousy preacher and I've decided you don't deserve to be saved."

Thank God, we don't have to be concerned that there are strings attached to our salvation, or anything else that we receive from God. **What God gives us is permanent, as far as He is concerned.** (Romans 11:29)

"For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance."

What God gave us came with no hidden agenda and no manipulation of any kind. We are all free to accept the gift of salvation with no strings attached.

Sometimes people give you something and attempt to use what they gave you to control you. We say the gift came with "strings attached" meaning the motivation in the heart of the giver isn't pure. They have ulterior motives that involve manipulation and control. It may look like a gift given with pure motives, but if used to manage you then it is not a gift at all. **Genuine gifts never come with strings attached.**

There are other things besides Christmas presents that we receive from and give to people which aren't held in boxes. These intangible "gifts" come in all forms, including such things as a position in an organization, accolades or admiration from peers, and the most sought after is acceptance.

For example, if you're the type of person who longs for the acceptance of others, craves pats on the back, and is desperate to be acknowledged for special skills, abilities, or achievements, then you are vulnerable to the manipulation of others. You see, you're looking for something to be given to you by another person. **Never forget that what people give you people can take away from you, but what God gives you is permanent.**

Let's say you have a character deficiency that cries out for acceptance, needs to be acknowledged or admired by others, or craves to be part of the "in" crowd. Once others detect your weakness and they determine you have value to them they gradually welcome you into their inner circle. As long as you abide by their "unspoken" rules and provide them what they want, they are happy to reciprocate. It is a mutually beneficial relationship until one day you realize you're being used.

Perhaps you gave your unwavering loyalty to their cause, only to find out you were just a “cog in their machine”. You were accepted, and even admired as someone worthy to have a voice in their group. But sadly there was a price tag, which when you refused to “pay up” caused everything to come to a screeching halt. These are the ways of man and are diametrically opposed to the ways of God.

Maybe you’re wondering if the Bible has any examples of people who desired the acceptance of their peers so much that they forsook the truth that had been revealed to them. As a matter of fact there is one very good example of this in the New Testament. Someone who walked close to Jesus, yet who willingly opposed the revelation they had received in an effort to maintain the acceptance of their peers. Peter was that man.

In Acts 10, Peter received the revelation straight from God that the message of salvation was also for the Gentiles. Peter fell into a trance and saw a sheet knit at the four corners and let down to the earth. It had all manner of animals in it, some of which the Jews were not supposed to eat. Peter was then told to kill and eat. When he objected, a voice said: (Acts 10:15)

“What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.”

Three times this was repeated and then Peter was taken to the house of a man named Cornelius, a Gentile, where he made the following declaration based on the trance. (Acts 10:34-35)

“Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, ‘Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: (35) But in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him.’ ”

These words were proof that Peter understood the message of the vision that salvation was not only for the Jews, but also for the Gentiles. Peter then watched as the Holy Ghost fell on the Gentiles to whom he had just preached. (Acts 10:44) He was so confident in what he was doing and saying that he determined that those Gentiles should be baptized. (Acts 10:47) After all of this, wouldn’t you think that Peter would be the loudest voice promoting salvation to the Gentiles? Surprisingly, he was not.

Keep in mind, the Jews had predominately been the only people to whom the message of salvation was preached, and many of them were still rejecting the truth. Add to that the prospects of throwing open the doors of salvation by faith

to the “swine eating” Gentiles and it’s easy to see how an already difficult situation escalated. Not to mention the fact that many of the Jews who had received salvation by faith were holding on to the works of the Law because they believed it added something to their salvation. Clearly these were difficult times.

Peter appeared to have dragged his feet when it came to declaring the message of salvation to the Gentiles, even though God had shown him the vision. Years later, with no support from anyone, Paul took it upon himself to share the Gospel with the Gentiles in Antioch, after the Gospel had been rejected by the Jews. (Acts 13:46)

“...but seeing you (Jews) put it from you (the message of salvation by faith), and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.”

Paul became the Apostle of faith to the Gentiles, which brings us to the main point of this teaching. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul makes note of how he received the right hand of fellowship from the leaders in Jerusalem, which included James, Cephas (Peter), and John, after they acknowledged that he had been sent to the Gentiles. (Galatians 2:7)

“But contrariwise, when they saw that the Gospel of the uncircumcision (the Gentiles) was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision (the Jews) was unto Peter.”

The reason there was even a need for a decision to be made was because a problem arose between Peter and Paul in Antioch. Paul “withstood him (Peter) to the face.” (Galatians 2:11) What in the world could have caused Paul to stand up to Peter so strongly? Peter, the man God gave the message that salvation was available to the Gentiles, played the hypocrite before the Gentiles by separating himself when the leaders from Jerusalem arrived.

Peter lacked the strength of character to risk the probable rejection of his peers for the sake of the truth. (Galatians 2:12)

“For before that certain came from James, he (Peter) did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision.”

Of all people to commit such a blatant act of hypocrisy, the man through whom the very revelation came. When Peter knew the “uppity ups” from Jerusalem were about to arrive, he stopped eating with the Gentiles. The only reason Peter

stopped eating with them was because he feared being rejected by his peers for not continuing to adhere to the dictates of the law. Peter knew in his heart what was right because he had received the revelation that God was no respecter of persons. Yet, Peter bowed to the desires of others and forsook the truth.

Thank God for a man like Paul who called Peter on his hypocrisy and refused to bow to the “peer pressure” no matter what it cost him. Paul wasn’t impressed by the positions of men nor did he allow them to affect what he preached. (Galatians 2:3-6)

“But neither Titus, who was with me, being a Greek (a gentile) was compelled to be circumcised: (4) And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us under bondage: (5) To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you. (6) But of these who seemed to be somewhat, (whatsoever they were, it makes no matter to me: God accepts no man’s person:) for they who seemed to be somewhat in conference added nothing to me.”

Unlike Peter, Paul wasn’t looking for anything from anyone. Paul wasn’t willing to sacrifice the truth of the gospel in order to be accepted by man. He said, “Whatsoever they were it makes no matter to me.” There was no deficiency in Paul’s character that made him vulnerable to the control of other people.

Peter, on the other hand, was in fear and that is never of God. His fear caused him to forsake the truth that God had revealed to him and promote the false doctrine being endorsed by his peers from Jerusalem.

Apparently, Peter’s relationship with those leaders gave him something that he wanted. His fear of opposing them indicates that benefits he gained from his association with them came with “strings attached”. Whatever he gained from them he wasn’t willing to give up no matter if it meant being a hypocrite.

I would imagine the thoughts in Peter’s mind were something like this. “If I continue eating with the Gentiles, these Jewish leaders might not give me the respect I deserve. I might even lose my status as a leader in Jerusalem. I’m not going to do anything to risk their acceptance, even if it means violating the truth.” There was a “hook” inside of Peter; a weakness of character that was hungry for the things men can give. Paul only cared about the things of God.

In conclusion, we all deal with issues of wanting to be accepted by our peers. We hunger to be admired, respected, or given a voice amongst our friends. Since people give us these things they can easily take them back. What we should invest our lives in are the things that are permanent, which only come from God.

There is a place of spiritual development, such as we see in the life of Paul, in which we don't hunger for the acceptance of others. Like Paul, we won't be moved by the positions of men or what others can give to us. Our only motivation will be love and pleasing our heavenly Father.

I encourage you to not spend your life striving for the acceptance and admiration of others only to discover later that it came at a price, "strings were attached". Put to death those weaknesses that others might use against you and find your total fulfillment in the permanent things God gives you. Thank God, HE will never reject you. HE will always love you no matter what.

Merry Christmas!

Mark Jenkins