

On the following pages you'll find a composition, just as I wrote it on the day back in 2013. It looks like I must have cleaned up some if not all of the typos my impaired vision at that time caused - any remaining I'm leaving alone. I hope it is of some help to some.

Larry Brunelle

P.S. As I write this, it's early 2019, and my vision is FAR better. You need not fear sharing the road with me. :-) Thanks be to God!

Composing this November 8, 2013, recovering (as I hope) from surgery to resolve a bleed in my right eye. That eye currently is foggy with post-op blood and can't traverse as normal, resulting in double vision. My left eye is limited by an advancing cataract. Typing this is difficult. I am reminded that my vision may get better, but over time, maybe a short time, it could get much worse. These symptoms proceed from diabetes, and other systems in my body could come to be similarly compromised. Even if that didn't happen, I see that most of what I call "life" on a day-to-day basis depends on my vision. Currently, I can read or write only with great difficulty, meaning I can't work, and you do NOT want me driving a car. Were I rendered permanently only this current level of "blind", I'd be well-nigh useless. Were I to become REALLY blind, I'd be a serious drain on all around me, even with my best intentions, and productive work would be difficult to imagine, let alone achieve.

So I'm minded to begin to set forth a few thoughts, while I can, that might go into this year's Christmas card/letter, should we be able to produce and send same.

At Christmas, we give gifts. Regardless of our beliefs, it's become a cultural thing. Those of us with at least a nominal Christian heritage may associate these gifts with the gift God made of His Son, frequently carried in our minds as a helpless little baby, venerated by those who recognized Him as Messiah. Less often, perhaps, we reflect upon the nature of this gift, and why it was given.

For Christ (that's simply the Greek rendering of "Messiah", rendered further into English) came into this world as a baby, first and foremost, to reveal Himself to man as true God and true man, to die a truly horrible death at the hands of men, separated from His Father, explicitly to pay the penalty for our sins. Only He could do this: only His death would be sufficient - not yours or mine. And that sufficiency was confirmed by His resurrection.

Now, to many that sounds like nonsense. What kind of a great gift is that? Somebody I don't know dies two thousand years ago, and that's a gift to ME? What am I missing?

Suppose though, that there is a God, and that He is both just and holy. By His very nature, He can't and/or won't abide sin. You have an all-powerful Being, whose nature and character define morality. It is contrary to His nature to abide sin; by His justice, sin must be paid for. Sound harsh? It's not; if you were crippled by an another driver's error, you'd be injured and justice would demand he pay accordingly. Same with God and sin.

Suppose further, YOU had sinned against God. (You did, and do daily, just like the rest of us.) In God's justice, the wages of sin is death. So how are you going to pay? With your death. No big deal, you might say - I was born on a sure and certain track to death. But when God speaks of death, He's not just talking about physical death. You are, at bottom, an immortal being - you persist into eternity. When men speak of death, they often mean the cessation of functioning of the body. When God speaks of death, He speaks of separation - yes, the separation of you from your body, but also the separation of your soul, your self, or mine, from Him. And that's the separation we all earn. You don't have to be VERY evil, as men count evil. You simply have to be not morally perfect. If you were the best driver ever, always obeying every traffic law, and you sneezed and missed a stop sign, an officer could ticket you, you could go before a judge, and be fined and have points on your license. No perfect driving record any more. That's you and me before God. Some less, some more, but all sinners alike.

Now, suppose (because it's true) you and I, and everyone who ever lived, have a debt toward God that can only be paid by our separation from Him. Keep in mind that all peace, joy, love, and happiness are available for eternity only in the presence of God. Separation from Him entails an eternal supply of

pain, misery, torment, and frustration. The Bible calls it a lake of fire. You do NOT want that as your eternal destiny.

Suppose, then, that someone could pay your debt to God. Then God's justice would be satisfied, and you could enter His presence without fear.

Someone did.

And He didn't pay your debt with money, because that wouldn't satisfy, any more than you could buy your dad off when you had a good licking coming. It was costly. It was a horrible, ghastly, painful death. He was beaten so as to be unrecognizable, made to carry the instrument of His death to the place of His death, nailed through sensitive parts of His body, and raised to the sky on a cross, in naked shame, as a low criminal, to be mocked by fools like us. Then, as the culmination of His agony, He was intentionally abandoned by His Father to die alone - suffering that very separation that was to be ours, as we richly deserve, And this was all by plan and intention; He knew what He was in for before He came on that first Christmas.

What is the gift? That you and I were ransomed by the only One Who could do so. My eyes have been tearing as I write this, and I'm not exceptionally given to do that. The realization of what that gift cost - it's too much to take in, but the hint of it provokes tears. If you're following these thoughts, perhaps your eyes leak also. It's an amazing gift.

Hard to believe? In one sense, yes - we don't like to believe we are sinners, we don't like to believe we are BAD sinners, we don't like to believe we are at enmity with God, and we don't like to believe that such a bloody sacrifice was how we might get off. Surely, we think, God could just let us go - why go through all that? Well, depend upon it, if it wasn't necessary, He wouldn't have done it.

There is a gift. Like any Christmas gift someone wishes to give you, you must take it to enjoy the benefits. You don't pay for it - you can't. It's free. You receive it by faith. That means you believe in Him who gave Himself for you. You believe He is Whom He said He is, that He really did this for you because you really needed it and because He loves you, and that you will rely on Him and His finished work to pay for your sins. You decide to reckon that Jesus paid your debt. You choose to receive Him.

He never takes back His gift from you. He gives you the Holy Spirit to indwell you and empower you, and you have eternal life, as a present possession, from Him the moment you accept His surpassing gift.

It comes to me that some may not easily grasp "free" - how I can owe so very much and yet not have to pay it. A weak and imperfect analogy (to which we all might relate) might be as follows. I was offered, and chose to accept, employment with some large firm with acres of money. This firm offers group health insurance (it 's a large enough firm to self-insure), disability, and life insurance as part of the deal. I have an unrecognized preexisting cardiac problem. I report on the first day, and almost immediately I collapse on the floor and am rushed to the hospital, where the cause is discovered. I undergo a long series of treatments culminating in a heart transplant. The cumulative medical bills are staggering, far beyond my lifetime earning power even if restored to full health. As it happens, I am disabled for life. But because of the relationship I have with my employer, I'm not required to pay anything - my employer pays it all, out of provision it had made long before I was hired. The

employer gets nothing from me, and I get all the benefits, including a provision extending beyond my death. That's a whole lotta "free" , acquired legitimately solely by a relationship I freely chose. And that's a scenario still possible among men on this earth, yet it pales next to the offer God makes to you and to me in the gift of His Son.