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December 26, 1882

Holiday Gifts

The holiday season is fast approaching with its interchange of gifts, and old and young are intently studying what they can bestow upon their friends as a token of affectionate remembrance. It is pleasant to receive a gift, however small, from those we love. It is an assurance that we are not forgotten, and seems to bind us to them a little closer. {RH December 26, 1882, par. 1}

Brethren and sisters, while you are devising gifts for one another, I would remind you of our heavenly Friend, lest you should be unmindful of his claims. Will he not be pleased if we show that we have not forgotten him? Jesus, the Prince of Life, gave all to bring salvation within our reach. Oh, matchless love! he left his royal home, his high command, and stooped to share our poverty and shame, that we might be exalted to share his riches and his throne. His glorious perfection called forth the admiration of the angelic host; yet he, their adored Commander, came down to a world sunken in sin, that he might give us a perfect example in his life. Step by step, he descended to the deepest humiliation, that he might reach fallen, guilty men, and lift them up to become sons of God. For us he submitted to insult and shameful abuse. For us he denied himself at every point. He suffered even unto death, that he might give us eternal life. {RH December 26, 1882, par. 2}

It is through Christ that we receive every blessing. We may come to him in our poverty and need, and he will listen to our petitions, and supply our every want. We are dependent upon him every moment for grace and strength to maintain our integrity and to continue in his love. How often we need to have the bread of life broken to our souls! How often we need to be refreshed at the fountain of living waters! Every temporal as well as every spiritual blessing, is a continual witness of his beneficence. The recurring seasons, with the rich and varied blessings which they bring, the refreshing rain and the glad sunshine, every good thing we receive, attests the continuance of our Creator's gift to man. {RH December 26, 1882, par. 3}

Shall not all these precious tokens of his love call forth a response from us in free-will offerings for his cause? Shall not our heavenly Benefactor share in the tokens of our gratitude and love? Come, brethren and sisters, come with your children, even the babes in your arms, and bring your offerings to God according to your ability. Make melody to him in your hearts, and let his praise be upon your lips. Let us rejoice that our Saviour liveth to make intercession for us in the presence of Jehovah. As a people we have backslidden from God; let us return unto him, and he will return unto us, and will heal all our backslidings. Let us, upon the coming Christmas and New Year's festivals, not only make an offering to God of our means, but give ourselves unreservedly to him, a living sacrifice. {RH December 26, 1882, par. 4}

From this time till the opening of the new year, let the theme of our thoughts be, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all his people."

You have taxed your inventive powers to prepare something that will surprise and gratify your friends. Let us in these last days of 1882, be as anxious, as earnest, as persevering, to render to God that which is due him. {RH December 26, 1882, par. 5}

While our heavenly Father has crowned our lives with abundance to supply our temporal wants, his mercies have been abused because they were so full and free. Many forget that their obligations to God increase with the continuous manifestations of his love and care, and that all these call for acknowledgment from us in gifts and offerings to sustain the various branches of his work. Such have now a precious opportunity to redeem the past, and to show that God has the first place in their affections. Let not our best thoughts, our most earnest efforts, our most precious offerings, be given to earthly friends, while our Creator is neglected and forgotten. I speak to those who profess to be his dear children: What will you bring to God as a token of your love and gratitude? However small the offering, he will accept it, if it is the best you have to bring, and is given in love and sincerity of heart. {RH December 26, 1882, par. 6}

I feel sad as I think how many are so engrossed with thoughts of their friends and the gifts they are preparing for them that they will lose sight of their obligations to God. They will not seek to purify the soul temple from defilement that they may present to the Lord an offering in righteousness. During the past year, Satan has been making most earnest effort to sow discord and dissension among brethren. Now, as the old year is passing away and the new year coming in, is a good time for those who have cherished alienation and bitterness to make confession to one another. "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed." This is the Lord's direction; will we obey him, or choose to remain in pride, and justify our course of wrong? Oh! that many may seek to have the sins of the past year blotted out, and pardon written against their names in the heavenly record. {RH December 26, 1882, par. 7}

We must forgive those who trespass against us, if we would obtain pardon and grace when we approach the mercy-seat. Mercy and love must be cherished by all who would be followers of Jesus. When Peter asked, "Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?" Jesus replied, "I say not unto thee, Until seven times; but Until seventy times seven." He then enforced the duty of forgiveness, by the parable of the two debtors. One was forgiven a debt of ten thousand talents, and then refused to show mercy to his fellow-servant who owed him a hundred pence. The pardon granted to that hard-hearted servant was revoked, and he was delivered to the tormentors. Our Lord makes the application of the parable in these impressive words: "So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses." {RH December 26, 1882, par. 8}

Here is work for every family and every church. Make haste, brethren and sisters, to improve the few remaining days of 1882 in setting your own hearts in order, and making every wrong right. Remember that we shall be forgiven only as we forgive. Let all enmity, dissension, and bitterness die with the old year. Let kindness and brotherly and sisterly affection revive in our hearts. We may open the new year with a clean record. How happy the thought! Let us draw near to God "with a true heart in full assurance of faith," that the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, may keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. {RH December 26, 1882, par. 9}

I entreat the followers of Jesus not to let the precious opportunities of these coming days pass unimproved. Let not time and means be spent in preparing gifts which will benefit neither giver nor receiver. Remember that both your time and means are intrusted you of God, and that he will call you to account for the manner in which you employ his gifts. As Christians we cannot honor a custom which is not approved of Heaven. Let us, rather, seek to bring our hearts into a right condition, to free ourselves from pride, vanity, selfishness, and every other evil, and let mercy, truth, goodness, and love dwell therein. Let us remember the Lord our Creator, and bring to him the offering of gratitude, and he will accept not only the gift but the giver. We may have such a spirit of love and joy in our hearts and homes as will make angels glad. {RH December 26, 1882, par. 10}

If all the means that will at this holiday season be expended to gratify unsanctified desire, or that will be needlessly invested, were brought as an offering of gratitude to God, to be used in advancing his cause, what an amount would flow into the treasury! Who are willing this year to deviate from their usual custom? How many will turn their thoughts and plans into a more elevated, heavenly channel? In this time of peril and backsliding from God because of selfish indulgence, will we not look from the human to the divine? Will we not show our remembrance of God and our gratitude for his continual mercies, and, above all, for the gift of his dear Son? Shall we not seek to conform to the Divine Model? to imitate Him who went about doing good? {RH December 26, 1882, par. 11}

I address my brethren upon whom God has bestowed of this world's goods: What will you do at the beginning of this new year to show your gratitude to the Giver of all your mercies? Will you return to him in willing offerings a portion of the gifts he has freely bestowed upon you? Will you, by your Christmas and New Year's gifts, acknowledge that all things belong to God, and that all the blessings which we receive are the result of divine beneficence? {RH December 26, 1882, par. 12}

When Jesus ascended to Heaven, he committed his work on earth to his disciples, and bade them carry it forward in his name. As followers of Christ we are to be his representatives among men. The salvation of perishing souls calls for our personal effort and for our means. This should be the great object continually before us. It is to accomplish this that God has intrusted us with means. Let us then render to him that which is his own. Let the men of means make a free-will offering to God by liberal gifts for our publishing houses and other institutions. These important instrumentalities in the cause of God are heavily burdened and seriously crippled in their work for want of means. There are still debts upon some of our houses of worship. If we would this year deny ourselves, and by our offerings clear these from debt, would it not be pleasing to our heavenly Father? {RH December 26, 1882, par. 13}

And it is not the wealthy alone that can aid in advancing the work of God. If our young men would but deny self for the truth's sake, if they were willing to work hard and economize, they might have a capital with which to pay their expenses at college, and thus qualify themselves for greater usefulness, and they might also have a reserve fund to answer the calls for means for the different branches of our work. If our young sisters felt the claims which God has upon them, they would dispense with ornaments and needless trimming, and would earnestly seek for the inward adorning; and instead of expending all their earnings for clothing or in selfish indulgence, they would have something to spare for the cause of Christ. {RH December 26, 1882, par. 14}

In every church, however small, special efforts should be made to show our gratitude to God by bringing our offerings for his cause. Let those who desire a Christmas tree make its boughs fruitful with gifts for the needy, and offerings for the treasury of God. And let the children learn

the blessedness of giving by bringing their little gifts to add to the offerings of their parents. {RH December 26, 1882, par. 15}

The claims of God should take the precedence of any and every other, and should be met at any cost or sacrifice to ourselves. However small our income, we should faithfully reserve for him that which he claims as his. Saith the Lord, "Them that honor me I will honor." To withhold our tithes and offerings from the treasury of the Lord, is accounted of him as robbery. Yet are there not many, even among us, who meet all other claims before the claims of God? Some bring no offerings for his cause, and even withhold the tithe, which he has distinctly reserved for himself. Some of these persons are yet in apparent prosperity. In his great mercy God is still sparing them that they may see and put away their sin. Others are already feeling his curse upon them. They are brought into straitened circumstances, and feel less and less ability to give, when if they had made God's claims first, and had with a willing heart brought their offerings to him, they would have been blessed with more means to bestow. {RH December 26, 1882, par. 16}

"God loveth a cheerful giver," and if we with a grateful heart bring our gifts and offerings to him, "not grudgingly or of necessity," his blessing will attend us as he has promised, "I will open you the windows of Heaven, and pour you out a blessing." And though it may have cost self-denial and sacrifice on our part, the approval of our conscience and the blessing of Heaven will make this holiday season one of the happiest we have ever experienced. {RH December 26, 1882, par. 17}

While urging upon all the duty of first bringing their offerings to God, I would not wholly condemn the practice of making Christmas and New Years gifts to our friends. It is right to bestow upon one another tokens of love and remembrance if we do not in this forget God, our best friend. We should make our gifts such as will prove a real benefit to the receiver. I would recommend such books as will be an aid in understanding the word of God, or that will increase our love for its precepts. Provide something to be read during these long winter evenings. For those who can procure it, D'Aubigne's History of the Reformation will be both interesting and profitable. From this work we may gain some knowledge of what has been accomplished in the past in the great work of reform. We can see how God poured light into the minds of those who searched his word, how much the men ordained and sent forth by him were willing to suffer for the truth's sake, and how hard it is for the great mass of mankind to renounce their errors and to receive and obey the teachings of the Scriptures. During the winter evenings, when our children were young, we read from this history with the deepest interest. We made it a practice to read instructive and interesting books, with the Bible, in the family circle, and our children were always happy as we thus entertained them. Thus we prevented a restless desire to be out in the street with young companions, and at the same time cultivated in them a taste for solid reading. {RH December 26, 1882, par. 18}

Those in charge of our publishing houses at Battle Creek, Mich., and Oakland, Cal., have been led by a sense of duty to make a careful selection of the best books, which they offer for sale at reasonable rates. Those who wish books will do well to purchase these in preference to the great mass of current literature that will strengthen neither mind nor morals. Many of our people already have the "Life of Christ." The "Life of Paul," now offered for sale at this Office, is another useful and deeply interesting work which should be widely circulated. The volumes of "Spirit of Prophecy," should be in every family, and should be read aloud in the family circle. More than one-half of our people know little or nothing of the contents of these books, and they are losing much by their neglect. {RH December 26, 1882, par. 19}

The Testimonies contain instruction which meets the case of all, both parents and children. Should these be read aloud to the entire family, the children as well as the parents would be benefited by their counsels, warnings, and reproofs. While these are placed out of sight and neglected for the reading of fictitious, sensational literature, both yourselves and your children will be retrograding mentally and spiritually. {RH December 26, 1882, par. 20}

Many Sabbath-keepers neglect to take the Review, and some have neither the Review nor the *Signs*. They plead as an excuse that they cannot afford to take these papers which it is so important for them to have. But in many cases several secular papers will be found upon their tables for their children to peruse. The influence of most of the periodicals of the day is such as to render the word of God distasteful, and to destroy a relish for all useful and instructive reading. The mind assimilates to that which it feeds upon. The secular papers are filled with accounts of murders, robberies and other revolting crimes, and the mind of the reader dwells on the scenes of vice therein depicted. But indulgence, the reading of sensational or demoralizing literature becomes a habit, like the use of opium or other baleful drugs, and as a result, the minds of thousands are enfeebled, debased, and even crazed. Satan is doing more through the productions of the press to weaken the minds and corrupt the morals of the youth than by any other means. {RH December 26, 1882, par. 21}

Let all reading of this character be banished from your houses, let books that are useful, instructive, and elevating, be placed in your libraries and upon your tables, with the Review and Herald, our church paper, and the *Signs of the Times*, our missionary paper, and the effect upon both parents and children will be good. During these long winter evenings, let parents see that all their children are at home, and then let the time be devoted to the reading of the Scriptures and other interesting books that will impart knowledge and inculcate right principles. Let the best reader be selected to read aloud, while other members of the family are engaged in useful occupations. Thus these evenings at home may be made both pleasant and profitable. Pure healthful reading will be to the mind what healthful food is to the body. You will thus become stronger to resist temptation, to form right habits, and to act upon right principles. {RH December 26, 1882, par. 22}

There is in many families professing to believe the truth, a shameful neglect of searching the Scriptures. They are ignorant, when it is their privilege to be wise. All should take time for the daily study of the word of God, with earnest prayer that they may learn the way of life and salvation. That holy word is a sure guide, and will enable all who search its pages to distinguish between its sacred truths and the false doctrines so widely taught in these times of peril. I urge upon you, my brethren and sisters, the necessity of searching the Scriptures. Your eternal destiny depends upon your understanding and obeying them for yourselves. There the plan of salvation is clearly set forth, God's claims are plainly stated, and if we are his obedient children we shall search carefully and prayerfully to learn his will that we may do it. {RH December 26, 1882, par. 23}

We need to think more of God and less of ourselves. If we would but think of him as often as we have evidence of his care for us, we would keep him ever in our thoughts, and would delight to talk of him and praise him. We talk of temporal things because we have an interest in them. We talk of our friends because we love them; our joys and our sorrows are bound up with them. Yet we have infinitely greater reason to love God than to love our earthly friends; we receive more from him than from any other friend, and it should be the most natural thing in the world to make God first in all our thoughts, to talk of his goodness and tell of his power, and to respond to his love by our free-will gifts and offerings for his cause. All things belong to God; and the rich gifts

he has bestowed upon us, the glories of the heavens, the beauties of nature, the bounties of his providence, are not for us to worship; they were not given to absorb our thoughts and love so that we should have naught to give to God; they are to constantly remind us of him, and to bind us in bonds of love and gratitude to our gracious Benefactor. Oh! I entreat you who profess to love God to be less self-caring. Center your affections upon Jesus, your Redeemer. Give up all for him, be willing to make any and every sacrifice to save souls for whom he died. Give him your loving homage, your willing service, and he will bestow upon you the priceless gift of everlasting life. {RH December 26, 1882, par. 24}