

PRESENTS

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When I was a boy I was fortunate enough to have a grandfather who was very clever at making models. One Christmas he made me a large, working model of a tank, and another year he made me a model submarine which actually fired torpedoes and shells. For many nights afterwards I found it difficult to get to sleep, and I kept looking over the side of the bed to make sure that my presents were still there. At least my grandfather had the satisfaction of knowing that I really appreciated his loving gifts and the skilful work which he had put into them.

But what shall I say about the very strange story which I heard the other day and which concerned a lady who had recently died and was found never to have opened all the gifts which she had received since the day of her wedding? Her executors found all the parcels, still wrapped up in their original paper and stored away. She had never even opened them to look at the contents, let alone put them into use. It was a sad collection, calculated to cause real regret to the original donors if they ever heard what had happened to their gifts.

Gifts are meant to be appreciated and also to be put into use. First of all, though, they have to be given, and no doubt you have found pleasure in making gifts as well as in receiving them. It is especially good when you see your friends enjoying and using your presents. Recently, though, I bought a present for a friend and am glad to say that he has not yet made any use of it. Moreover I hope that he never will. I feel certain that he shares my hope, though I can assure you that he is far from ungrateful. The truth is that my present was a fire extinguisher.

My friend and his family live in a wooden house in the country, and when I visited them I realised how important it was that they should be protected against fire. That is why I made this unusual gift which they never want to use.

Now both of these cases show us how *not* to regard God's free gift of salvation. It is not to be thought of as a kind of fire extinguisher, only to be turned to in our last

desperation. It is true, of course, that salvation is meant to deliver us from destruction and if we receive the Lord Jesus we need never fear a lost eternity, but it is much more than that. God's gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ is not just an ornament or a precaution but an inward power to meet our every need.

This brings me to the strange case of the lady who never opened her presents. Had she no needs? Was she so well off that she could do without others? Was she perhaps suspicious? Did she fear to open the parcels and enjoy the good things which they contained? Or was she careless, always meaning to open them at some later date, but never doing so? In any case her story was a sad one, and we can only regret how much she must have missed.

Take care that you do not miss God's wonderful love gift of eternal life. Mind that you are not so proud, so suspicious or so careless that you miss what God wants to give you. Paul once wrote to young Timothy, telling him to "lay hold on eternal life" (I Timothy 6:12) and that is what you should do, too.

From *A Witness And A Testimony*