

“WHAT A GIFT!”

Philippians 1.29

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Imagine what an unsaved person must think of Christianity. As well, imagine how disappointed he must be when he thinks he has tried Christianity out for a while, and it turns out to be nothing like he thought it was.

Here is the unsaved guy's problem: He had a false hope and did not really “try out” Christianity at all. His idea of what Christianity is came from what he saw on so-called Christian television, what he heard on so-called Christian radio, what he read in so-called Christian literature, what he sees in the lives of so-called Christians, or the impressions he brought into the auditorium with him from his childhood as he sat week after week without really listening to what the Gospel preacher said.

If he first became interested in what he thought to be Christianity by listening to a guy on a video, then this poor deluded soul may have been convinced that the way to be saved is to commit his life to Christ. That is no way to be saved; that is essentially salvation by works, salvation by personal commitment. However, the lost person honestly thinks they are saved after committing their life to Christ.

Since there is very little critical thinking anywhere in Christendom these days, and since it is considered bad form to question or doubt anyone's profession of faith (no matter how perverse or unscriptural someone's testimony may sound), this still lost guy ends up being accepted into the so-called Christian community by other so-called Christians, who have what amounts to the same problem he has; they are not saved either, having their own issues with false hopes.

Therefore, you have all these unsaved so-called Christians who have banded together into religious communities. Some of them attend large, so-called churches, while others attend small, so-called churches. Some participate in seminars, where principles are discussed for two or three days, but where none of the essential doctrines of the Christian faith are ever addressed. Others will attend events where there are thousands of unsaved men who feel terribly guilty about being such lousy husbands and fathers, and who promise to work on those things, but overlook the need to be a saved husband and father before they ever think about being a good husband or father. Still others will get their spiritual thrills from involvement in so-called Christian television, where they can pick and choose between musical performers, preacher performers, healing performers, faith performers, or whatever other kind of performer you might want that day.

Amazingly, one of the most common themes that runs through these so-called ministries is the assumption that God wants you to be happy all the time, that God wants you to be materially prosperous all the time, and that God wants you to be physically healthy all the time. Many of these so-called ministries will have just enough sick and suffering people to claim that they have a balanced view of the subject, but the underlying message they communicate to one and all is full physical health, material prosperity, and, most of all, no suffering.

Therefore, what happens when a person who is not genuinely saved begins to suffer affliction? He will likely fall by the wayside and conclude in his own mind that this Christianity thing doesn't work. “I know. I tried it,” he will say to himself. However, what happens to the person who really is saved, who really does know the Lord Jesus in a saving way? What happens when he begins to suffer for Christ's sake? He will think there is something wrong, something wrong with him, something wrong with his preacher, or perhaps something wrong with others.

He will think something is very wrong because when you are spiritual and right with God, you are not supposed to suffer affliction. That is the message he has received from Christian TV, Christian videos and podcasts, and just about everyone else. Is there something wrong with you when you suffer affliction? What do you find when you look at God's Word?

The Philippian congregation to which Paul wrote was concerned. Things had turned for the worse for them. They were being persecuted for their faith in Christ. They were being accused of being disloyal Roman citizens. They did not worship in the same way as other Philippians, because they raised their children differently than others, and because they served the Lord Jesus Christ. Understandably, this bothered them. "Why is this happening?" they asked among themselves.

In Philippians 1.29, the Apostle Paul began to tell them why they were suffering affliction. Turn there in your Bible and read that verse with me:

"For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake."

Consider what Paul wrote here. This verse shows us that salvation entails a great deal more than many people counted on when they trusted Christ.

Two observations:

First, IN THIS VERSE IS MENTIONED THE GIFT THAT GOD GIVES

Please pay careful attention to the fact that I said, "***The*** gift that God gives." Note several important features about *this* gift:

First, *the* gift that God gives is selectively given. Paul begins the verse, "But unto you it is given." Who is the "you?" The "you" happened to be the members of the Philippian Church. Not suggesting for a moment that you had to be a member of the Philippian Church to be saved. It is worth noting, however, that there is no indication in Scripture or history that anyone in Philippi was a genuinely saved person who was not part of the Philippian Church. Saved people go to Church. The primary point I aim to make here is that this gift is not given to everyone. True, the Gospel invitation is extended to everyone. True, the Gospel is to be preached to everyone. However, the gift Paul was referring to —the gift of God, which is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord —is not given to everyone.¹ Not everyone is saved.² Not everyone goes to heaven upon death.³ Only those who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ are given this gift Paul refers to in this verse.⁴

Second, *the* gift God gives is singularly given. Take note of the fact that the verse reads "For unto you it is given." It may not seem important to you right now, but I am about to point out something to you that will make this word "it" very important, indeed. You do not use the word "it" to describe two or more things. You use the word "it" to describe one thing, and only one thing. I say this because people often get confused about the gift of salvation that God gives to those who come to Christ by faith. As they experience different things over time, some people think they are being given several other things. However, as we shall see, the translators captured the meaning of what Paul wrote by their phrasing in English, which suggests that only one gift is being given here, although parts of it are experienced at different times.

¹ Romans 6.23

² Matthew 25.46

³ Matthew 25.41

⁴ Acts 16.30-31

So, *it* is a gift that God gives. *It* is a gift that is singularly given; that is, *it* is only one gift, after all. Third, *the* gift is graciously given. It may seem redundant to say that something is graciously given, since 'grace' actually refers to a gift; however, the emphasis is essential and needs to be made. Look at the phrase "it is given." That phrase translates a single Greek verb. Three things about this single Greek verb are pretty vital for us to know:

First, the verb is passive with no explicit statement of who is performing the action of the verb. In other words, we are not told who is doing the giving. In the Greek New Testament, this is referred to as the divine passive, and it is understood that when left unstated, the One acting is God. Therefore, God is the one Who is doing the giving here.

Second, the verb's root is the Greek word for "grace." Therefore, it is to be recognized that God is not giving anything here to anyone who deserves it or who has earned it. What God is giving here is graciously given by God.

And *third*, the action of the verb is complete.⁵ In other words, this is not something God will do. The gift that Paul is writing about here is a gift that has already been given to the Philippian believers, even though they will continue to experience different facets of this gift of salvation over the course of time.

Therefore, this gift has been graciously given by God to the Philippians to whom Paul is writing. This gift is given to a select group of people, not just anyone. And it is a single gift that is given, not several.

Second, IN THIS VERSE IS MENTIONED THE DESCRIPTION OF GOD'S GIFT

Understand that Paul attempts, here, no complete description of the salvation in Christ that the Philippians enjoyed. Instead, he sought to meet their need for encouragement and comfort in a time of severe trial and persecution by explaining to them only two facets of this great salvation God gives in Christ:

First, it was given to them on behalf of Christ not only to believe on Him. Who is the primary beneficiary of salvation? Who do you think derives the most significant benefit when some sinner turns from his wickedness and comes to Jesus Christ by faith? When God the Father draws a sinner to His Son for salvation, who do you think God's primary concern is for? In other words, what is it that gives the Father His greatest delight? Writing to a group of suffering believers with the intent of getting their attention off of themselves, but rather to look at their plight from God's perspective, Paul pointed out that their salvation "was given to them on behalf of Christ." My goodness. How much easier it is to endure suffering when you realize that it is not for you. Sometimes you can hardly see how it would benefit you. However, when it is for Christ, when it is a result of Christ's atoning work on the cross, then it is different. You see, you will do for Him what you would never want to do just for yourself. Amen? At this point, Paul told his readers that "it is given in the behalf of Christ to believe on him." This is how a sinner is saved, by believing on Him. Believers everywhere know this. We do not have a problem with this. However, notice. Paul wrote, "not only to believe."

It was also given unto them on behalf of Christ to suffer for His sake. This is just as much a part of the salvation you have in Christ as the forgiveness of your sins. This is just as much a part of the salvation you have in Christ as is going to heaven when you die. This is just as much a part of the salvation you have in Christ as the joy unspeakable and full of glory. God does not pull any punches in this regard. Throughout His Word, we see that suffering is part and parcel with faith in Christ. Look at what the writer of Hebrews tells us about those who lived before Christ, Hebrews 11.37-40:

⁵ Fritz Rienecker & Cleon Rogers, *Linguistic Key To The Greek New Testament*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Regency Reference Library, 1980), page 548.

- 37 They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented;
38 (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and *in* mountains, and *in* dens and caves of the earth.
39 And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise:
40 God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.

Now, look at what Peter wrote in First Peter 4.12-14:

- 12 Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you:
13 But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.
14 If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy *are ye*; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified.

Finally, listen to what the Savior Himself said, in John 15.20:

“Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also.”

This does not sound at all like the Christianity of the Trinity Broadcast Network. This does not sound like T. D. Jakes, Joel Osteen, or Kenneth Copeland. That is because what you see on television and hear on so many podcasts, and for the most part read in so much Christian literature published these days, and see in most so-called churches, is sadly not Biblical Christianity.

You who are saved from your sins through faith in Christ, recognize that it did not occur primarily for your benefit, but for Christ's sake. Likewise, the suffering that you go through is not mainly for your benefit, but for Christ's sake! It is a testimony to His goodness and greatness, certainly not your worthiness.

You are not at the center of the universe. God is. The Lord Jesus Christ is. Therefore, when God saves a sinner who comes to His Son, Jesus Christ, by faith, he is saved from sin and he is saved unto glory in heaven. Understand, however, that the path to glory leads through the valley of suffering.

Therefore, do not fall into the despair of condemnation every time you experience suffering, whether from persecution or from some other quarter. God has marvelously graced you to allow you, for Christ's sake, not only to believe on Christ, but also to suffer for Christ's sake. That is God's plan for your life, Christian.

SERMON:

Although he does not actually use the word “salvation,” it is clear that Philippians 1:29 deals with the subject of salvation. In this verse, Paul sought to show his readers some critical truths about their salvation.

That which I have focused on is the truth that salvation is something that God gives, and that salvation is more than just faith in Christ and the forgiveness of sins. Much more. To those believers who were suffering horrible persecution, Paul wanted to communicate that their salvation also included the very suffering they were enduring at that moment in time.

Let us now move beyond that to focus on salvation differently. Consider salvation, not from the perspective of a Christian who is going through persecution and may not understand why, but from the standpoint of an unsaved sinner.

To you who are here without Christ, and who are willing to consider this matter of salvation, not by evaluating and scrutinizing fraudulent Christians, or by judging the merits of a corrupt Christendom that passes itself off as the faith once delivered to the saints, but by the infallible Word of God, there are three questions I want you to leave here with the answers to:

First, WHO IS SALVATION GIVEN BY?

If you understand salvation to be the deliverance of the sinner from his sins, from the penalty of his sins in Hell and later the lake of fire, from the power of his sins with grace for living, and from the presence of his sins in glory throughout eternity, then there can only be two possible answers to this question of “who gives salvation?”

Either man gives salvation or God gives salvation. There are various aspects and elements associated with religion. There are different ceremonies and rituals. However, when you cut through all the chaff and get right down to the real nitty-gritty, the only thing that really matters is whether or not God is the author of someone’s salvation or man is the author of someone’s salvation, because man, the depraved sinner, needs salvation.

Listen to these passages and decide for yourself what God’s Word tells us about salvation:

Exodus 14.13: “And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD.”

Jonah 2.9: “Salvation is of the LORD.”

John 1.12-13: ¹² But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, *even* to them that believed on his name:

¹³ Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

John 6.44: “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him.”

John 6.65: Jesus said, “Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father.”

Finally, there is Romans 6.23, which I mentioned earlier:

“but the gift of God *is* eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

The what? The gift of God. This thing called eternal life, or salvation, is a gift that God gives. If it is given to you by God, then it is not given to you by you, or by any other creature. Understand, also, that since not everyone is or will be saved, that since not everyone goes to heaven, God does not give salvation to everyone. God gives salvation, but He does *not* give salvation to everyone.

Second, WHO IS SALVATION GIVEN FOR?

Salvation is given for Jesus Christ. Paul wrote, “For unto you it is given in behalf of Christ.”

Once each year, we celebrate Easter. Easter is the annual celebration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead three days and nights after He was crucified, suffered, bled, and died. All over the world, the resurrection of Christ is celebrated by people who don’t really believe it occurred, in ceremonies led by ministers who don’t really believe it occurred. And people who do believe in the resurrection will trivialize it with unrelated distractions such as Easter eggs and chocolate bunnies.

I believe Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, rose from the dead, bodily, three days and three nights after He was crucified on a cruel Roman cross. But why was He crucified and slain on that cross? My Lord Jesus became sin for me, He who knew no sin.⁶ He was punished for my sins by God, after that the Lord had laid on Him the iniquity of us all.⁷ Thus, when salvation is given to someone who comes to Jesus Christ by faith, salvation is given by God to that believer *for* Jesus Christ.

Therefore, salvation should not be understood so much as something which may be given to you for your benefit, though you certainly would benefit from being saved. Instead, it needs to be understood that salvation is given for Christ's sake. What God does He does for His Son, just as what the Lord Jesus did, He did for His Father, with those who are saved being the happy recipients of God's grace.

How else could it be, my friend? Who would the Lord Jesus do what He did for? Not you, alone. Not me, alone. Ultimately and actually, the Lord Jesus did what He did for His Father. Ultimately, and actually, God gives salvation for His Son, for His benefit, for His honor, for His glory, because He is well pleased with what His Son Jesus Christ did on the cross of Calvary. Salvation is given *by* God, but salvation is given *for* Jesus Christ.

Finally, WHO IS SALVATION GIVEN TO?

Salvation is given to sinners, but not to every sinner. You are a sinner, without a doubt. You have a wicked heart, without a doubt. You are self-centered and selfish. Is that not evidenced by many of the things in your life? Is that not evidenced by the plans some of you are now making to do evil, to sin against God knowingly? The fact that someone is a fornicator who is planning on fornicating again shows him to be a sinner. The fact that you are a sneak and a liar shows you to be a sinner. The fact that there is no fear of God before your eyes shows you to be a sinner. The fact that you are given over to debate, deceit, and whispering shows that you are a sinner. Being a sinner, you are separated from God by your sin, and your sinfulness guarantees that when you pray to God, He will not listen to you, Isaiah 59.2. That you are a sinner, however, does not disqualify you from being a candidate for the grace of God. Remember Romans 5.8:

“But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

Salvation is given to sinners, and you are a sinner. However, salvation is not given to *every* sinner. Perhaps you are one of those sinners who will never be saved.

Salvation is given to convicted sinners, but not every convicted sinner. The Lord Jesus told us that the ministry of the Holy Spirit included preparing sinners for the truth of the Gospel. In John 16.8, He said that the Holy Spirit

“will reprove (or convince, or convict) the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.”

We know that before a sinner is saved, he must be prepared by the Holy Spirit, he must be convinced beyond all doubt of his own sinfulness and inability to save himself, else he will feel no need to be saved.⁸ Such is the deceitfulness of a sinner's heart that until the Holy Spirit convicts you, until the Spirit of God drives deep into your heart your own sinfulness in the sight of God, you will not be much interested in being saved.

⁶ 2 Corinthians 5.21

⁷ Isaiah 53.4-10

⁸ This is not to deny that sinners sometimes turn to Christ the first time they are exposed to the Gospel of God's grace in Christ.

Has that happened to you yet? Has the Spirit of God awakened your cold and dead heart to the reality of your sinfulness? Has that lying and spiteful heart of yours begun to race with the fear of conviction? Do you see yourself standing in the shadow of God's gallows? Do you smell the sulfur from the pit ascending into your nostrils? Do you feel the flames of the wrath of God's judgment licking at your feet? Have you started waking up in the middle of the night with sweats? Have you started to ask yourself, "What am I going to do? What am I going to do?" Have you tried and tried and tried again to be good, but found that your efforts were to no avail? Do you find yourself cowering before the scrutiny of a holy God Whose piercing gaze searches out and finds in you nothing but wickedness, nothing but sin, nothing but rebellion? Perhaps you are being spiritually awakened. Maybe you are being convicted by the Holy Spirit. Just remember, many who the Holy Spirit convicts perish. Many who become concerned about their sins die in their sins and are tormented in the flames forever.

Salvation is given only to convicted sinners whom the Father draws to Jesus Christ. Remember that the Savior told those men that unless they were drawn to Him by the Father, they could not come to Him. Thus, you must come to Christ for salvation. Unless you come to Christ by faith, there is no salvation for you, and you will die in your sins. "But pastor, how do I know that the Father is drawing me to Christ? How do I know that I can come to Him for salvation?" Remember, my friend, He is the bread of life. Are you hungry? He has water to drink that will quench your thirst forever. Are you thirsty? He said,

"Blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled."

Are you sick to death of sin and tired of trying to make your own way? Then turn to Christ. When you have come to the end of yourself, when you have tasted sin and found it sickening, when you have found that there is nowhere else to turn but to Jesus Christ, there is nowhere else to go but to Him, *then* perhaps you are being drawn to Him by the Father. When you heed Christ's invitation to

"Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest,"

then you are being drawn to Him by the Father.

God gives salvation. We have seen that in our text and in Romans 6.23. It is not something that is given by man, either in whole or in part. And salvation is given *for* Jesus Christ. It is not given for you or for me. And it is given *to* sinners, who are convicted of their sins, and who are drawn to Christ by the Father.

You need salvation. You stand condemned of sin in the sight of God, sinning against Him in the most grievous ways, yet salvation is offered to you through faith in Christ.

To paraphrase the writer of Hebrews, how shall you escape if you neglect so great a salvation? Apart from this way, there is no other way. Come to Christ now.