

Philippians 1:27-30

Bringing Gospel Truths into Sharper Focus

For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ... v. 29

If you've ever looked at a distant object through a pair of binoculars then you know that when you first looked through the lenses everything appeared first as a blur. You also know that there's a focusing wheel in the center of the binoculars and as you turn that focusing wheel to adjust the lenses to your eyes then all those blurry objects come into focus and you're able with the right adjustment to see very clearly things that are far away.

I think there's a sense in which Phil. 1:29 is doing that. Paul is bringing into sharper focus certain gospel truths. And he's doing this for a reason. The very first word in the verse – the word *for* indicates there's a connection between what follows with what precedes. What precedes is the exhortation in v. 27 that the Christian walk worthy of the gospel of Christ. *Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ* Paul writes in that verse.

We've seen in previous studies that the Christian is walk worthy of the gospel and that he's to stand fast in the truths of the gospel and that he's to strive together with other Christians for the faith of the gospel. And while he's engaged in walking, standing fast and striving together with other Christians he's to be courageous – *in nothing terrified by your adversaries* Paul writes in v. 28.

And then there comes this little word in the beginning of v. 29 – *for*. What follows is going to provide the incentive for the Christian to heed the exhortation. Or another way to put it is that Paul is going to give the reasons why the Christian should heed the exhortation. Here's why you should walk in a manner worthy of Christ and stand fast in the truth of Christ and strive together for the faith of Christ. The reason is this – *For* or the word could be translated *because*. *Because unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ not only to believe on him but also to suffer for his sake*.

What a clear statement to demonstrate the truth of Jonah 2:9 that tells you that *salvation is of the Lord*. Salvation is entirely of the Lord. It was designed by God the Father; it was executed by God the Son; and it is applied by God the Holy Spirit. Salvation is of the Lord and yet it's with regard to God being the author and finisher of salvation that the focus of some Christians is blurry.

They don't understand how salvation can be entirely of the Lord. It seems counter-intuitive to say such a thing because of your awareness that you had a part in it. You did do something that brought you from the condition of sin and misery into the state of salvation. In some way or another you responded to the gospel invitation to come to Christ. It could have been through that invitation being given in a sermon or it could have been an invitation that you read in a piece of gospel literature or it could have been through the invitation that is given in the Bible itself.

The point is you were exposed to that invitation and you responded to that invitation and as a result of that response you became a Christian. And let me say here that I don't deny the reality of that experience. There are some hyper-Calvinists that distort the truth that salvation is of the Lord by refusing to even give the gospel invitation. I think that view of salvation is out of focus as much as the person who thinks he actually had an intrinsic role in his salvation.

If I could borrow from the illustration of the binoculars again – you know that when you're focusing those binoculars you sometimes bring the object you're looking at into focus but then you keep turning the focusing wheel and in your attempt to focus even more sharply you end up instead making your view blurry and so you have to turn the wheel back the other way to achieve your sharpest focus.

That can happen to a Christian theologically if he reasons from his theology in such a way that he ends up being unscriptural but perhaps in a different direction. What I want you to see from v. 29 this morning is that Paul is bringing certain gospel truths into very sharp focus not simply so the Philippians might become better theologians but so that they might become better Christians and find the right source of motivation for walking, standing fast and striving together.

And if you, this morning, will come to understand and appreciate what exactly Paul is writing in v. 29 then it should have that same impact on your life. It should not simply make you a better theologian than someone else; it should not simply make you a little smarter than those that chafe against some aspects of gospel truth but it should make you a better Christian. And so I want to call your attention to this theme of sharper gospel focus.

How Can We Sharpen Our Gospel Focus?

Consider with me first of all that we can sharpen out gospel focus:

I. By Knowing that the Source of Our Salvation is God

When we read in v. 29 *it is given* then we should be immediately struck by the truth that if something is given then there must be a giver. And in the case Paul has in mind it is obviously God who is the giver. He is the giver of salvation and he is the giver of everything that pertains to salvation.

You, of course, know this to a certain degree. One would question whether or a person was even saved who didn't know and appreciate that *God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life.*

God gave his Son. And his Son gave himself. Speaking with reference to Christ Paul writes in Ga. 1:4 that *Christ gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father.* In the very next chapter of Galatians we read in 2:20 *I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but*

Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. This particular aspect of salvation, the aspect of Christ giving himself is set forth as the standard by which husbands are to gauge their love for their wives – Eph. 5:25 *Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.*

These are a couple of things that are related to idea of God being the giver of salvation. But remember Paul's purpose in our text. He's bringing the gospel into sharper focus with aim of making the Philippians better Christians. And so we must delve into other things in salvation that pertain to God being the giver.

From Jn. 17 we note from Christ's high priestly prayer that the Father has given to Christ a work to do. Verse 4 *I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.* In v. 6 we see a line that becomes something of a refrain in Jn. 17 *I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word.* Verse 9 *I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine.* Verse 11 *Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me...*

And in connection with the people that the Father has given his Son we may note also from v. 8 *For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me.* Do you begin to see, then, how much of a giver God is when it comes to salvation. The Father gave his Son to the world; The Son gave himself; The Father has given a people to his Son and the Son has given you the very words that his Father gave him.

The Holy Spirit also enters the picture. In Lu 11:13 we see how much greater a giver God is than man when Luke writes: *If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall [your] heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?* And then there's Joh 14:16 where Christ says to his disciples *And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever.*

Surely there is no denying that our God gives and that he gives bountifully and that he gives everything that is needful for our salvation and for our spiritual growth. But still I haven't dealt with the words of our text in Philippians 1:29. We must therefore bring these gospel truths into even sharper focus by noting that it is God that gives the sinner faith to believe the gospel.

Note again the words: *unto you it is given...to believe on him.* Do you believe on him today? I hope you do and if you don't I hope you will. And if you do you should realize that even that aspect of salvation – the aspect of exercising faith in Christ – that is something that is also given. The same thing applies to any believer that applied to Peter when upon his confession that Jesus was the Christ, Christ said to him in Mt. 16:17 *Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.*

Peter was blessed in his confession. Christ doesn't say that he was wiser than others in his confession or that he possessed a greater degree of inherent spirituality than others in his confession – no he was blessed in his confession because his very ability to make such a confession was given to him by God the Father. This same truth is conveyed by Paul in that very familiar verse in Eph. 2:8,9 *For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.*

On the other side of the coin, so to speak, there is repentance. Some argue whether or not repentance is a necessary thing for salvation. It seems that some Christians can perceive more clearly the fact that repentance is a work and so they wonder whether or not saying repentance is necessary for salvation is tantamount to saying that salvation is by works. The issue becomes easy to resolve when you realize that like faith, repentance is something that is also given by God.

When Peter preached before the Jewish council he boldly said to them in Ac 5:31 with reference to Christ: *Him hath God exalted with his right hand [to be] a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.* And when Peter took the gospel to the Gentiles his brothers in the faith were initially appalled. Going to the Gentiles was unheard of. But when Peter rehearsed the way God had moved among those Christians gathered in the home of Cornelius they came to a definite conclusion which they express in Ac 11:18 *When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.*

So God is the giver in salvation. The question that Paul raises to the Corinthians in 1Cor. 4:7 can apply to the Christian's salvation when he asks: *who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive?* I should add here that within the church God also is the giver. He gives spiritual gifts to his people. That's a subject for another study at another time. Let me just affirm it here that God gifts each Christian in a particular way and that the Christian, then, has the opportunity of serving Christ with the ability that God gives him.

I listened to a sermon a while back by John Piper on this subject of spiritual gifts and I really liked his approach to the topic. He exhorted Christians not to worry so much about trying to discern their gift. What they should do instead is search for needs in others and then search out ways they can help with those needs. And in that process the Christian will discover his gift.

Now I can't leave this point without calling your attention to the very thing that Paul emphasizes most strongly in our text. You see that it is given to the Christian not only on the behalf of Christ to believe but also to suffer for his sake. Doesn't that statement put God's providential dealings with you in a whole new light?

Here is where our focus must be sharp where it pertains to the things that are given. Your trials are given to you; your afflictions are measured out to you; the challenges you face in life don't come to you haphazardly, they are not accidental. They are given to you by the same God who gives you everything that pertains to salvation and everything that pertains

to your good and his glory. This is, to be sure, one of the aspects of salvation that we strive to grasp and tend to doubt or misread. We have the propensity to think that in every difficult situation in life God must be punishing us. I must have done something to forfeit his blessing for now he's dealing with me harshly.

And if that mindset comes to dominate your soul then you'll find it very challenging to emulate the Apostle Paul who rejoiced in everything and could not be robbed of his joy. Do you remember in our study last week that I gave you the key to courage, so to speak? How do we reach the place where we are (to use the words of v. 28) *in nothing terrified by our adversaries*? The same thing applies to what we're not considering in v. 29 on the topic of suffering. The key is being persuaded – being persuaded that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ.

Listen to Ro 8:32 *He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?* He gives you all things. He gives you his Son and he gives you his Spirit and he gives you his word and he gives you faith to believe that word and he gives you repentance unto life and now it is given unto you on the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him but also to suffer for his sake.

How your sufferings will be sanctified to your soul if the truth will rule your heart that they are given to you and they are given to you for a reason. And this leads to my next point to consider. We've seen that our focus in gospel truth is sharpened when we see God as the giver of salvation and all that pertains to it. Consider with me next that our focus is also sharpened:

II. By Knowing that the Reason for Our Salvation is Christ

This is something that I think is easy to miss in our text and yet it really is a point of emphasis. Notice that Paul says *it is given to you in the behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake*. Those two phrases *in the behalf of* and *for his sake* are identical expressions in the Greek.

One of the things I've come to appreciate about the New American Standard translation of the New Testament is the pains the translators took to make sure that there is little or no variation to the English that arises out of identical phrases in the Greek. This doesn't always enhance the literary value of the translation but it does make for a certain amount of precision. Listen to how the NAS translated this verse: *For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.*

You see those two phrases – *for Christ's sake* and *for His sake*. In those phrases you are given the reason for your salvation and the reason for everything that pertains to your spiritual growth and walk with Christ. It is all for Christ's sake. I like the definition I found in the Encarta English dictionary for the word *sake*. It defines it as *the purpose of doing, obtaining, achieving, or maintaining something*.

And when you take the time to contemplate that your salvation is ultimately for Christ's sake and everything that is dealt to you is for Christ's sake then this too sharpens your focus as to why things happen to you that happen to you.

I've been re-reading a book that I hope to utilize in our Sunday School studies on what it means to glorify God. This book is all about the self sufficiency of God. It's perhaps the only book I've ever read that is able to bring out the practical value of the doctrine of God being all sufficient in himself. Let me read you a couple of quotes from that book:

We need to see first and foremost that God is God—that he is perfect and complete in himself, that he is overflowingly happy in the eternal fellowship of the Trinity, and that he does not need us to complete his fullness and is not deficient without us. Rather we are deficient without him; the all-sufficient glory of God, freely given in fellowship through his sacrificed Son, is the stream of living water that we have thirsted for all our lives.

Now that statement may sound a little highfalutin – something that only seminary professors and theology students can appreciate. But listen now to the application that is drawn from the statement about the all-sufficient glory of God: *Unless we begin with God in this way, when the gospel comes to us, we will inevitably put ourselves at the center of it. We will feel that our value rather than God's value is the driving force in the gospel. We will trace the gospel back to God's need for us instead of tracing it back to the sovereign grace that rescues sinners who need God.*

That statement is particularly pertinent that says *we will feel that our value rather than God's value is the driving force in the gospel*. Oh how tempted we are to think that way! I suppose, in a sense, it becomes natural for us to think that way. After all God has done so much for you. He has demonstrated his love for you. He has given his Son for you. He has sent his Spirit to you. He has exalted you by making you a member of his family and a joint-heir with Christ.

Isn't this all about you, then? And the trouble is that when you fall into that kind of self centered thinking you will find it hard to cope with challenging providences. You'll find yourself arguing with God or at least arguing in your own mind about God when you say either to God or to yourself – I don't understand what you're doing God? I don't understand why you've made life so hard for me now.

You've blessed me so richly with salvation and you've given to me the assurance of heaven. You've forgiven my sins and clothed me with Christ's righteousness. You've bestowed so many spiritual and temporal benefits on me so now why, God, are you treating me in a way that seems to be so inconsistent with the way you've blessed me?

If you find yourself reasoning that way I would suggest to you that you've fallen into the temptation of thinking that you are at the center of the gospel and your value to God is the driving force of the gospel. What these identical phrases in our text indicate so plainly to us is that we are not at the center of the gospel and our value is not the driving force of the gospel. The gospel is for Christ's sake and the sufferings that are given to you are for His sake.

Now I don't want to be misunderstood here as if to suggest that you have no value to God. I would be contradicting a whole lot of sermons I've preached to suggest that. I have said on a number of occasions that the value of something or someone can be measured not necessarily by intrinsic value but rather by the price someone is willing to pay. And Christ paid a very high price for your salvation.

But what I'm trying to convey to you just now based on the words of the text is that the gospel is not all about you – it's all about Christ. Your salvation has an aim behind it that goes beyond you. God's aim is the glory of Christ. This is conveyed 3 times in the first chapter of Ephesians where Paul notes that the Christians predestination and adoption is *to the praise of the glory of his grace* (v. 6); *That we should be to the praise of his glory* (v. 12); and in v. 14 Paul makes reference to *the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory*.

I hope your focus on the truths of the gospel are being sharpened this morning. A very necessary part of salvation is not only to save your soul from hell and to save you from the dominion of sin but to also save you from yourself. It was upon man's fall in the garden of Eden that he became self-centered and believed that the world ought to revolve around him. And such is the strength of inbred sin that we are capable of taking something like the gospel Christ and twisting the application of it in such a way that we can even use the gospel itself to cater to our self centered thinking.

The gospel, rather, is for the glory of Christ and so unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ not only to believe on his name but to suffer for his sake. This is all about him. Your aim must be to glorify him. And if your sufferings and afflictions and trials and challenges are designed by God and given to you for the demonstration of his glory then you can say amen to all his dealings with you.

You will find yourself compelled to walk worthy and stand fast and strive together because you've been delivered from yourself. Your freedom is found in the truth that salvation is ultimately to the praise of the glory of his grace.

How, then, do we sharpen our focus on gospel truths? We do so by knowing that the source of salvation is God and that the reason for salvation is Christ. I'll take the time to mention briefly that we also sharpen our focus on gospel truth:

III. By Knowing that the Test of Salvation is Faith

We've noted that there are two things mentioned in our text as things that are given. It is given unto you in the behalf of Christ to believe on him and it is also given to you to suffer for his name's sake.

What I want to do in closing this morning is to simply point out to you that there is a connection between the two things that are given – believing and suffering. Suffering, you could say becomes the test to validate whether or not you truly believe. To those that are ruled by the notion that salvation is only all about them – they will have no problem abandoning Christ when it becomes inconvenient to follow Christ.

When the challenges of life become acute and Christ no longer seems to be catering to the ease of the professing Christian he'll walk away from any identification with Christ and if he is some time later exposed again to the gospel he'll say *I tried it but it didn't work for me.*

What he really tried was to give God the opportunity to fulfill his every whim and wish and when that didn't happen he concluded that the gospel was ineffective for his life. To the true Christian, however, who by the grace of God has believed on Christ – he'll find himself clinging to Christ. He'll find himself able to think beyond himself in terms of God's glory. Like Job who never lost the integrity of his faith throughout the duration of his long and difficult trial he'll find himself questioning God and perhaps even challenging God but he won't find himself giving up on God or turning away from God.

He'll find in the course of his trials that his sinful nature becomes even more evident to him. But he'll also recognize that that's a part of God's purpose in his trials – that he might see his sin more fully and become appalled by his sin and seek Christ more fervently to gain the victory over his sins.

If that's your case this morning – if you find your faith being tested but you find your faith in Christ remaining intact then you can console yourself in the midst of your trials this way – *unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.*

You have cause to rejoice even in your trials in that you still find yourself believing in Christ. If you were not a true Christian you would not believe in him. You would hold him in contempt for his failure to cater to you. But since it is given to you to believe and to suffer for his sake you find a higher purpose in life and deeper meaning to the perplexities of life. By God's grace you're able to trace the purpose of God's glory in everything that's dealt to you by God.

Is that your testimony this morning? If it is then you have a compelling case for walking worthy, for standing fast and for striving together for the faith of the gospel.