

# “The Greatest Gift of All”

By Randy Boer

## Scripture

Turn with me to Ephesians 2, you will find this on page 1818 in your blue pew bibles.

<sup>1</sup>As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, <sup>2</sup>in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. <sup>3</sup>All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. <sup>4</sup>But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, <sup>5</sup>made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. <sup>6</sup>And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup>in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

I would like to draw your attention especially to the following three verses.

<sup>8</sup>For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— <sup>9</sup>not by works, so that no one can boast. <sup>10</sup>For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

## Intro

Gifts are fun, aren’t they. When Christmas comes around you see all the brightly colored gifts laying under the tree. Each one has the promise of something good, or once and a while something practical. (ie. like in my family, socks.) Although, I have come to appreciate those gifts as well. I can just see kids faces light up as they open their gifts and discover the treasures inside.

I think we all love gifts to some extent or another. Some gifts are obviously better than others, but they are all special, because we are getting something we didn’t earn or do anything to deserve.

## The Greatest gift

Today, I am going to talk to you about the greatest gift. When Jesus was on this earth, he told his disciples, that “I have come that you may have life and have it abundantly.” I can say honestly, that I don’t know yet all that this gift has to offer, but from what I now already it is like no other gift we have ever had, or will ever get.

Do you know that Adam and Eve, the first two people ever created by God, used to just walk and talk with God as they walked along, in the garden of Eden. They had complete fellowship with Him. When they were created, they were perfect. There was no suffering, no dying, there were no weeds in the garden, they were totally spiritually alive and life was good. Yet something happened to them in the garden. They disobeyed God

and the rest of all humanity has paid the price ever since. Because of them, every human being born has been born spiritually dead and unable to have the fellowship with God they were created to have.

But God knew that once that relationship was broken, we were incapable of restoring that relationship. But 2000 years ago, Jesus Christ died on a Cross and rose again to new life, so that we could be saved. We made a way so that we could once again become spiritually alive.

### **How do I get this gift?**

Do you know what separates Christianity from every other religion on the face of the earth. Every other religion is about what you do for God, or what you do for yourself. But Christianity is about what God did for us. In some religions, people have to go through many steps to finally reach an enlightened state and then will reach perfection. In some religions, being a martyr is a sure way into heaven. Even many people who claim to be Christian, are trying to do all the right things to get into heaven.

In fact, there are a lot of people who see getting into heaven as making sure that their good list, outweighs the bad. They are checking things out and say either, I am a pretty good person so I'm pretty sure that I will go to heaven. Or they say I know that I am too bad for God to ever let me into heaven.

But all these people are missing an important point. This passage tells us that it is not by our works that we are saved, but that it is by grace. Our salvation, the new life Christ brings is actually a gift. It is something that we have not earned but have received from God.

In Romans 3:23&24, it says that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. You see both people, the one who thinks they are pretty good and the one who thinks he is beyond help are included in this. If either of these two look to their own deeds to get them into heaven they are going to be sadly disappointed.

Now I am not saying that doing good works isn't important. The bible is full of stories and teaching that encourage us to live godly lives and do good works. Even passages that talk about blessing for doing good or punishment for doing bad. Even in this passage, by saying that we were created to do good works. I will talk a little more about this later. When I think about good works, I think about whether I am putting my hope in what I am doing, or in what Christ has done. I believe the important thing to realize, is that we are incapable of doing anything to earn this gift and that is why it had to be a gift. Like any gift, why do we have a response to the giver. We can accept or reject that gift and can even decide what we will do with it.

### **Faith is accepting the gift**

This passage says that this gift comes by grace, which means it is something given that we don't deserve, but it comes through faith. Faith is our response to the gift.

So what is faith? Whenever faith was mentioned in the old testament, it had two aspects to it. It first required belief and secondly required action. Abraham was called by God to go to the promise land and that a large nation would grow from him. Abraham had faith and he followed God, even though he didn't know where he was going.

I am reminded of the story of Jean Francois Gravelot otherwise known as the Great Blondin, arguably the greatest tightrope walker of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. We used to do a lot of amazing feats. In fact, he was the first person to cross the Niagra Falls on a tightrope. Since that time, he went across the Falls in more amazing ways each time. He did a backward summersault while crossing. He did it blindfolded and even cooked an omelette have way across. He would often attract a big crowd to these events.

Well, the story is told that at one particularly spectacular stunt, where Blondin would attempt to cross the Niagra River on a tightrope, he yelled a question to the crowd. He asked, "Do you believe that I, the Great Blondin, can successfully cross high above this river on a tightrope?" And the crowd yelled back, "We believe! We believe!" Then Blondin began his crossing, and to the thrill of the crowd, he made it safely. The crowd went wild. They clapped and cheered and yelled all the more.

Then Blondin asked the people, "Do you believe that I, The Great Blondin, can again successfully cross over the Niagra River on this tightrope -- this time while pushing a wheelbarrow?" The crowd enthusiastically yelled back, "We believe! We believe! We believe!"

So seeing their enthusiasm, Blondin yelled to the crowd: "Who among you is willing to ride inside of the wheelbarrow and allow me to push you as I cross on this tightrope?" The crowd went silent. No one said a word. All that could be heard was the sound of the wind blowing....

Sometimes it is easy to believe something, but a whole other thing to act on that belief. I am sure that a lot of that crowd really believed he could do it. They had seen him do a lot of amazing stunts before. But there was no one who was willing to step out in faith and put their life on the line for that belief. Faith is not only believing something is true, but taking action based upon that belief.

Now it could have been possible that the great Blondin could not have actually done the amazing feat that he tried. In that case people would have put their faith in him unwisely. In Iowa, the lakes freeze over in the winter time. They get a layer of ice on them, that you could walk on, or even drive on often. Yet each year people try to walk on the ice, before it is hard enough and fall through the ice. When faith is in something that is false, it can hurt you. However, when it is something that is real and that you can trust, taking of step of faith can actually benefit you.

In this passage, if we take a step of faith, we trust the our salvation comes from God, through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. God is trying to tell us what we can put our

faith in and truly be saved. In Romans 10:9-10 it says “That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup> For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.”

If we believe that God raised Jesus from the dead, we can also believe that he will raise us from the dead as well. The act of faith we bring, is in confessing that Jesus is the leader of our lives.

In <sup>1 John 5 10</sup> Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart. Anyone who does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because he has not believed the testimony God has given about his Son. <sup>11</sup> And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. <sup>12</sup> He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.

We are required to have faith. We need to believe that God can give us new life and that this new life comes through his son, Jesus. Trusting in Jesus is like driving out or even walking out on ice that is solid and cannot break. If we trust in anything other than that, it is like walking out on thin ice that will break and plunge us into the icy water.

Some people are trusting in other religions to get them to heaven. Others are depending on their own deeds. Either way, they are walking on thin ice and their faith is in something that cannot save them.

If our faith is in something true, then we can have hope for the future and even hope for today. In verse 13 of this passage, John tells us he has written these things so that we can know that we have eternal life.

<sup>1 John 5:13</sup> I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.

He is trying to give us an assurance of our salvation and that we can have hope, because our salvation is not dependant on us, it is on God. Some people go through life always wondering whether they are in or out of the kingdom of God. They wonder, what happens if I commit a sin right before I die. Will I then go to hell? Thankfully, God tells us that our salvation is not dependant on our works it is on the saving knowledge of Jesus his one and only son. In this passage we are assured that it is a gift from God to us. In verse 13 and 14 of Ephesians 1, which immediately precedes the passage we are looking at, it says,

“And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, <sup>14</sup> who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory.”

God is reassuring us that this gift is irrevocable. When we trust in Jesus, God seals us with his spirit, so that we can know that our salvation, the eternal life He promised us is guaranteed.

Many people get nervous when they hear this. They get afraid that Christians would stop doing good and would go off and live godless lives, if they thought that what they did didn't matter.

First of all, it does matter what we do. There may be punishment yet for sin and there may be blessings for our good works. But to say that these deeds affect my salvation is like telling God we would like to pay for something that He gave us, something we could never afford to purchase in our lifetime. It would be like God giving us a million dollar home and us saying, oh I can't accept that, but wait, I have \$500 in the bank, why don't I pay you for it with that. That would be absurd.

In verse 10, we find out that our good works are actually part of why God created us. He does intend us to do good, but not to earn His gift, but as a response of love. When we do good, we are actually becoming who we were made to be. When we live lives of obedience to God, we are realizing who we really are. Children of God created to do good works. This Spirit that God left in us as a guarantee, can actually help us to live the lives we are intended to live.

Conclusion

Illustration – The gift

I will offer a gift to several people, the first will reject it, the second say they don't deserve, the third say they don't need it, the fourth will accept it and not open it, the third will open it and try it, the third will get excited about it.

I asked these people to help me demonstrate a point. God has given us a gift, what will you do with the gift?

It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—<sup>9</sup> not by works, so that no one can boast. <sup>10</sup> For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

You might say