

## **THE PRISON EPISTLES: NURTURE FOR OPPRESSED BELIEVERS**

### **III. Philippians: Nurture In Living In Preoccupation With Christ**

#### **D. Nurture In Accepting God's Plan That We Even Suffer For Christ**

**(Philippians 1:29-30)**

#### **I. Introduction**

- A. When Paul wrote his epistle to the Philippians, he faced either being released from prison or being executed for the Christian faith, and this uncertainty tempted his readers to be troubled, Philippians 1:12-13, 20-21.
- B. Yet, Paul's readers also faced persecution, so after explaining God's blessing in his suffering (Philippians 1:19-28), Paul directed his readers in Philippians 1:29-30 to accept God's plan that included their suffering for Him:

#### **II. Nurture In Accepting God's Plan That We Even Suffer For Christ, Philippians 1:29-30.**

- A. Paul had just directed that his believing Philippian readers not be terrified by those who opposed them for their Christian faith (Philippians 1:28) before adding that "unto you it is given in behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake," Philippians 1:29 KJV.
- B. This phrase in the King James Version appears to give support for the Calvinistic view of divine election that God gives one an immediate gift of faith so he can even believe on Christ for salvation. However, the wider context and Greek grammar lead us to another interpretation (as follows):
  1. Grammatically, the infinitives "to believe" (*pisteuein*) and "to suffer" (*paschein*) appear as compound infinitives where both are objects of the verb "it is given" (*charizomai*), U. B. S. Grk. N. T., 1966, p. 683.
  2. Thus, if one believes the phrase teaches God gives one an immediate gift of faith to believe the Gospel of Christ to be saved (as in Calvinist theology), he must also conclude that God gives one the unjust suffering he faces for holding to His Christian faith. However, that view would counter the righteousness of God.
  3. In closer examination, we note that there are three appearances of the "anaphoric article" *to* in the verse, where its antecedent is "anarthrous," not actually being mentioned in the verse, but being well known, familiar, *Ibid.*; Blass, Debrunner, Funk, A Greek Grammar of the N. T., 1973, p. 205-206; C. F. D. Moule, An Idiom-Book of N. T. Greek, 1959, reprint by Cambridge Univ. Press, 1975, p. 30-31. The verse with these articles reads: "Because unto you it was given (*to*) on behalf of Christ not only (*to*) to believe on Him but also (*to*) to suffer for Him," and J. B. Lightfoot would suggest it is the "**privilege**" of suffering and believing that is meant by *to* (J. B. Lightfoot, Epistle to the Philippians, 1913, reprint by Zondervan, 1974, p. 85, 106). Thus, the verse would read: "Because unto was the **opportunity** given on behalf of Christ not only [the **opportunity**] to believe on Him, but also [the **opportunity**] to suffer for Him."
  4. In this way, God is no more said to author man's immediate faith in the Gospel of Christ to be saved [as in Calvinism] than is He the author of the evil suffering for the faith directed toward believers, but that it is the **opportunities** to hear the Gospel and also to suffer for Christ that are granted by God.
- C. Paul then shared with his readers that this dual opportunity was similar to his own experience described in Philippians 1:12-26: Paul's readers had the same "struggle, fight" (*agon*, Arndt & Gingrich, A Grk.-Eng. Lex. of the N. T., 1967, p. 14) of the life of faith in needing to trust God's help to handle persecution that they had first seen in Paul's life, and now heard he again faced in his trial for his faith, Philippians 1:30. Paul with his readers in God's plan had been granted the opportunity to believe in Christ and to suffer in His behalf, what is treated by God to be an opportunity for great eternal reward, cf. Acts 9:15-16 with Matthew 5:11-12.

***Lesson:*** Paul taught that the persecution his Christian readers were facing was similar to the persecution he faced, that the spiritual battle existed for both parties to trust the Lord to equip them to be spiritually victorious in such trials. Accordingly, they were to accept God's permissive plan that had not only given them the opportunity to believe on Christ for salvation, but also to suffer for Him for great eternal reward.

***Application:*** (1) May we like Paul and his believing readers at Philippi not be troubled upon facing persecution for our faith, whether it comes from the unsaved (Phil. 1:13) or from fellow believers (Phil. 1:14-17), but see it as an OPPORTUNITY from the LORD'S PERMISSIVE WILL in His ETERNAL PLAN for gaining God's GREAT ETERNAL REWARDS for RESPONDING to such trials by FAITH that GOD will make us spiritually victorious and cause us spiritual TRIUMPH regardless WHAT we face in those trials, Philippians 1:20! (2) May we also realize that Philippians 1:29 does NOT teach God gives us an immediate gift of faith to trust in Christ as is taught in Calvinism any more than He authors the godless persecution we face for Christ, but rather that He ALLOWS us the OPPORTUNITY to BELIEVE and to SUFFER for the Lord!