

1 Corinthians 15:3-11

For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time. For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. Therefore, whether it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

The Greatest of the Great

Mankind has a fascination for “the greatest,” that’s why the Guinness Book of Records is so popular! This theme is evident in Scripture as well. Christ was asked about the “greatest commandment”, Paul spoke of love as the “greatest” virtue among faith, hope and love, and in the book of Hebrews the reader is urged not to neglect “so great a salvation.” It is here that I wish to stop and ask: “Do you know what is the greatest thing about salvation?”

There are seven great things mentioned about salvation in Ephesians 2: 8-9: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” There is first the *Ground* of Salvation – “GRACE” – getting something that is not deserved. Because man continually disobeys God, he deserves the judgment of God. Salvation is the acquittal of that judgment because Christ took mans place in judgment. Next there is the *Character* of Salvation – “GIFT” – receiving something not earned . Because of mans propensity for sin, he cannot overcome guilt nor tip the balance of wrongs by doing right, justice prohibits this. Salvation is granted as a free gift, given out of love. Tere is also the *Means* (channel) of Salvation – “FAITH” – man’s response to the truth of God’s offer of salvation. God asks only that individuals would admit their personal sin before Him and believe that His Son, Jesus Christ, paid the debt of sin by dying on the cross and conquered the power of sin by raising from the dead. This faith is expressed in confession of sin and acceptance of the gift of life God offers. The text identifies the *Deliverance* of Salvation – “SAVED” – the Bible term for escaping the judgment of God upon sin. Scriptures teach that deliverance is a result of being; *redeemed* – Jesus paid the price of man’s sin, *justified* – declared innocent of wrong doing, *forgiven* – guilt removed and sin forgotten. This text speaks also of the *Condition* of Salvation – “NOT OF OURSELVES” – the admission that man can never improve himself to be morally acceptable before God. This leads to the *Comfort* of Salvation “NOT OF WORKS” – the removal of the burden of trying to meet God’s standard of perfection and the worry of wondering if there is yet something that must be done to satisfy God.

All these are great truths about salvation, but the greatest truth is *The Wonder of Salvation*: “by grace YOU have been saved.” This is the wonder that salvation is personal, that God Wants Me! Although God is self – sufficient, He desires a real relationship with every person. God’s heart is so great with love that God wants me, and God wants you!

In 1995, Christopher Reeve, the "Superman" actor, was paralyzed him from the shoulders down. In the days which followed both he and his mother considered pulling the plug on his life support system. But his wife, through tears, persuaded him to fight back, saying, "I want you to know that I will be with you for the long haul, no matter what. You're still you, and I love you." The greatest thing about salvation is God saying “You’re still you, and I love you and I want you.”

What is my response:
