

## **Is This a Gift? Philippians 1:29-30**

29 For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, 30 having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear is in me. NKJV

This past Friday there was a meeting of a Congressional committee examining religious persecution. It concerns an American who was in Iran helping with building an orphanage when he was arrested and sentenced to eight years in prison. This for being a Christian and telling others about Jesus.

<http://news.yahoo.com/state-dept-snubs-congressional-panel-aclj-wife-american-165500572.html>  
<http://aclj.org/iran/taking-pastor-saeeds-case-congress>

I read an article yesterday about a man in Southeast Asia who was recently released from prison after 12 years. All because he was making disciples and starting churches.

And a recent Baptist Press news article claims that there are some 70,000 Christians in prison in North Korea. <http://www.bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?id=39775>

In China, at least 132 cases of persecution affecting 4,919 Christians, including 442 church leaders, were reported last year, and increase of over 30%.

<http://www.foxnews.com/world/2013/02/21/christians-house-churches-in-china-see-erious-escalation-persecution-report/#ixzz2NIL45W8R>

In Rev 6:9-11 when the Fifth Seal is opened we see : The Cry of the Martyrs

When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held.10 And they cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"11 Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed. NKJV

Jesus said in John 15:18-20 "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you.19 If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. NKJV

Here in North America it does not look like we are suffering very much. But Christians do suffer in all communist and Islamic countries.

Here in America we think of ourselves as blessed by not suffering persecution, but our text seems to have a different view of all this. Let us look at this passage more closely.

I. A gift.

A. The word is the comes from the same word that we get our word grace or favor

from.

- B. In other words it is a special favor that God has for people when He allows them to suffer for His Name's Sake.
  - 1. Acts 5:40-42 40 And they agreed with him, and when they had called for the apostles and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.41 So they departed from the presence of the council, **rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.**42 And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ. NKJV
  - 2. We on the other hand thank God that we do not suffer.
  - 3. But the time may come when we will. For the country is a changing.
- C. So it is a gift, something to be desired, something of great value, something that we could rejoice in if we were but partakers.

## II. Not only to believe in Him.

- A. He compares the gift of suffering to the gift of faith.
- B. Not only is salvation a gift, but the very faith that we have is a gift, a grace from God.
  - 1. It is not something that we develop out of our wisdom, else we would praise our wisdom.
  - 2. It is not something that we received from our parents, else there would be no Christians among non-Christian parents.
  - 3. It is not something that someone else works in us, by the power of the will or power of persuasion.
  - 4. John 1:11-13 (NKJV) 11 He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. 12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: 13 who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.
- C. Even our faith is a grace, a gift of God.
  - 1. **Ephesians 2:4-9 (NKJV)** <sup>4</sup> But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), <sup>6</sup> and raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in *His* kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves;

*it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> not of works, lest anyone should boast.*

III. Suffering for Jesus is a grace, a gift of God.

- A. 1 Peter 4:12-13 (NKJV) 12 Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; 13 but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.
1. 'it hath been granted' ; freely bestowed as a gracious gift. The word is significant as opening the conception of suffering from the Christian point of view. God rewards and indorses believers with the gift of suffering.
- B. Paul did not shirk back from suffering.
1. Philippians 3:10 (NKJV) 10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death,
  2. Romans 8:17 (NKJV) 17 and if children, then heirs--heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.
  3. 2 Thessalonians 1:5 (NKJV) 5 which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer;
  4. 2 Corinthians 1:5 (NKJV) 5 For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ.
  5. 2 Corinthians 4:17 (NKJV) 17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,
  6. 2 Timothy 2:10-12 (NKJV) 10 Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. 11 This is a faithful saying: For if we died with Him, We shall also live with Him. 12 If we endure, We shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us.

If we are not favored to suffer for His sake, at least we should be able to live for Him.

If we live for Him we may very well suffer for Him. But look at 2 Tim 2:12 again.

If you are not called to give your life for Jesus in suffering and death, can we not give our life for Him by living for Him each day.

Suffering for Christ is a token of blessing, not a sign that God has turned His face away.

McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Php 1:30). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

“to suffer: Suffering is actually a gift from God, for in the midst of suffering He comforts us (2 Cor. 1:5) and enables us to rejoice (1 Pet. 4:12, 13). Suffering is a blessing because it brings eternal reward (Matt. 5:1–12; 2 Cor. 4:17; 2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 22:12). God sees suffering as a tool to accomplish His purposes both in His Son (Heb. 2:10) and in His children (1 Pet. 1:6, 7). Suffering, moreover, matures us as Christians in the present (James 1:2–4) and enables us to be glorified with Christ in the future (Rom. 8:17).”

Radmacher, E. D., Allen, R. B., & House, H. W. (1999). *Nelson’s new illustrated Bible commentary* (Php 1:29). Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers.

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### 'Boun': Imprisoned for Christ

[http://www.persecution.com/public/newsroom.aspx?story\\_ID=NTA0&featuredstory\\_ID=MzY2&clickfrom=ZmVhdHVyZWZrdG9yaWVz](http://www.persecution.com/public/newsroom.aspx?story_ID=NTA0&featuredstory_ID=MzY2&clickfrom=ZmVhdHVyZWZrdG9yaWVz)

Khmu Christian “Boun” spent 12 years and eight months in prison in Southeast Asia for his faith. He was released earlier this year. Before he came to faith in Christ, Boun was an assistant district governor for the communists.

In 1965, Boun had been a soldier in Southeast Asia. He eventually became the assistant of an important official. He first encountered Christians when he was sent to study politics in Tha Gnong in 1975. At the time, he didn’t pay much attention, but later as assistant district governor, he visited villages where there were Christians. He was intrigued by their worship, but these Christians were afraid of him because of his government position.

Once, while staying with a family in a village, he heard a Christian radio program supported by VOM. He asked questions, but no one gave him details. As a member of the government, Boun had permission to cross in and out of Thailand to conduct business. There, in 1997, he sought out the man he had heard speaking on the radio.

The Christians there were afraid of him, and he was just as afraid they would report him to the Lao government. But the man he sought was willing to meet with him. This man took him to a private room and explained Christ to him. The soldier was baptized that night and began to share the gospel wherever he went.

The authorities warned him over and over to stop preaching. He was let go from his job. He was arrested June 8, 1999, and sentenced to 15 years in prison. On Feb. 2, 2012, he was released, two years early. VOM supported him and his family while he was in prison, and provided medical care after his release.

VOM staff conducted the following interview with Boun shortly after his release. He began by sharing what happened immediately after his baptism.

Boun: I went back to my home church and talked about God. Many people would come; they wanted to become Christians. Soon, the whole village would come. I didn’t know how to lead them to Christ the Lord, so I went to meet with a Christian leader. I said, “Now that I’ve shared

the Gospel, many people want to become Christians. Please come and lead them to God. I don't know how to lead them." But he was scared and said, "I can't go there. You shouldn't even do this. You could end up in prison." I responded saying, "Oh, I worked with the government. I worked with the law. I know the law, and they can't put me in prison for more than two and a half years because I haven't done anything wrong."

On June 8, 1999, at 10 p.m., four of the church elders in my village were arrested by the police. They arrested me just 30 minutes later, and then they separated us into five small rooms.

I wrote a message on a small paper for the other prisoners telling them to say that they didn't know anything. I said, "Give me all the blame. I will pay for this, and you then can go back to preach the gospel and lead the church." The next day, they were put in stocks and interrogated twice. The elders took my advice and denied everything. Two of them were in prison for six months before they were released. The other two were sentenced to eight years in prison, but they both died three years before their sentence was up. I was the last one left in the prison.

In prison, I was always careful. I didn't eat the food that the prison or police gave me. I didn't drink the water they offered, afraid that it was poisoned. I didn't take any of their food. I had to be careful because I knew that my life was valuable for God and for his ministry.

Many times, the police came to interrogate me, saying smoothly, "Have a glass of water. You have a sore throat, and you are thirsty. You even sound thirsty. Here, have a cup of water." I would say, "No, thank you very much. I am not thirsty." Many times, they would offer me food and drink, but I didn't take it. I also told my friends not to take it, but they disobeyed.

Twenty days after I was arrested, they investigated me for five days before saying, "You don't tell the truth. We know that you are trying to do bad things to the country."

And then they put me in stocks. Stocks are a piece of wood, and it's very big—quite big. The stocks spread my legs apart, and they also put handcuffs on me. They were afraid that I would escape. They put me in handcuffs, and even put smaller ones on my thumbs. Then they put me in a black room without food for seven days.

One of the guards there secretly came to my room at 9 p.m. and give me a little food. I survived because of that food — that little amount of food from that man.

VOM: Did they give you anything to drink during those seven days?

Boun: Nothing. That room was very dirty, and I got leprosy. Yes, like in the Bible. I couldn't scratch my body because of the handcuffs, but my wife sent me some chili peppers because they wouldn't give me any medicine. I didn't have anything except a little rice to eat and the chili peppers my wife gave me. I prayed to the Lord, ground the chili and used the chili to reduce the itchiness. I did that until all the chili was gone, and my skin seemed much better.

When the chili was gone, the leprosy seemed healed. But a week later, a pain started in my eyes like something had bitten me. My wife came and asked for permission to take me to the hospital to treat my eyes, but the police said, "He is the enemy of our country. Don't treat him. Let him be blind, and let him die here. We won't allow you to go to the hospital."

They interrogated me 16 times, asking me, “Why did you go to many villages and tell them about the name of Jesus?” I answered, “No, I didn’t preach the name of Jesus. You’re the law. You give us the channel for us to do this because we have the right to believe anything. I preached God.” They were mad because I said that the law gave me the right to tell about Jesus.

VOM: Before you were arrested, when you were going to the villages, you said you were telling people about being a Christian, but you didn’t know how to lead them. What message were you telling them?

Boun: I proclaimed to them that becoming a Christian will release you, and God will clean your life. I said, “Become a Christian, and you will know that you have to repent. You will be free from seven habits. You might be released from your snake, tiger, peacock and pig heart.”

[Boun used a gospel presentation that uses pictures of animals that characterize how our actions and hearts are evil.]

VOM: So when you told the guard that you didn’t preach Jesus, you didn’t preach him by name.

Boun: When I proclaimed the Gospel, I told people to come to the Lord and repent. I only knew the first step. I didn’t deeply know the name of Jesus.

VOM: Why do you think that so many people responded?

Boun: They were mostly people who live in the countryside — people who smoke, drink and worship a false spirit. So I told them that if they became God’s children, they would be released. That is a big change for them because every year they have to sacrifice a pig, cow or buffalo to the spirit. When I tell them God can help release them, it is a big help — not just spiritually and physically, but financially as well.

In prison, I was locked in the room alone for more than one year, and during that time, I was never given a Bible. My family thought it was strange when I asked them to send me a Bible. I even asked the guard who brought me food if he would send my wife a message. I said, “Tell my wife, ‘Would you please help me? Bring me a Bible. I cannot live without the Bible. I have to read the Bible.’”

After about a year and half, they took me outside. Not outside the prison, but out of the dark room. Immediately, I was put to hard work carrying firewood twice a day. They forced me to carry firewood as big as a man’s thigh. Many times I was so tired, but the police would put a gun to my back and say, “Call to the Lord to come and help you. Shout to the Lord to give you strength.”

VOM: So what did you say when they taunted you?

Boun: I didn’t say anything. One time, the guards asked me if I was tired, and I told them I was. The guard asked, “What do you eat with rice?” I said, “Nothing. My wife only sent me rice and some vegetables.” The guard said, “Jesus’ money is flying around the world and around here. You should ask for him to drop some for you so you can buy a good meal.”

For ten years, they forced me to cut trees for slashing and burning the rice field. I would do that

for the police, who guarded the prisoners. I would mostly slash and burn their personal land, but sometimes I slashed other men's properties. The police still got the money. Twice a day, they forced me to go to the forest and find firewood.

In 2007, they trusted me and didn't guard me. They let me go alone to get the firewood. In July or August, they gave me two or three hours to get the firewood because the steam was flooding. I knew the routine, and on the first day I collected enough firewood for two days. On the second day, I swam through the flooded stream, ran to my house, took five Bibles and ran back. I hid the Bibles then carried the firewood back to the camp.

One day while I was carrying firewood, I had my bag with my Bible in it. The police said, "Hey, let me check your back." They found my Bible and took me to the office. They called me upstairs where there were many police. They asked me to tell them about the book and forced me to read it out loud. After I read for a while, I stopped and said, "Oh, I cannot finish all in one day, but if you want to know more, I will tell you." I was sharing the Gospel with them when a colonel entered the room. "What are you doing?" he asked. One of the policemen said, "We are learning about Jesus. Here is Jesus' book." The colonel said, "That awful book? Who brought it here? Throw it away!"

And then I said, "Sir, it's a good book. Please come and see if you don't believe." A few days later, they took me to the colonel's office. The colonel said, "Now, tell me about your book." When other police came into the office and saw that he was interested in what I was saying, they listened. Soon, even more police came in to listen to me. I proclaimed Jesus, and they told me, "You believe in a good thing." They began to treat me politely, but one week later, they were all removed. A new group of police was brought in.

When they took my first Bible, I never got it back. But I had a Bible buried in the room where I slept. A part of the floor was broken, so I would dig the soil out and bury my Bible there. I would put the broken concrete back and lay my sleeping mat on it. I read this Bible every day. I also listened to a Christian program on a small radio. I even heard my name mentioned, and it encouraged me. But one day the policemen came and checked all around my room and under the mat. They found the hole under my bed, took the Bible and radio and fined me. I didn't have any money, so I cut bamboo from the forest, wove a chicken cage and sold it to pay the fine.

VOM: How did you get the Bible and the radio inside the prison?

Boun: My wife and children left the radio at someone's house near the prison. The guards trusted me, so when I took the basket to go get vegetables, they let me. I got a big, leafy plant — I don't know the name in English. I then used that plant to wrap a Bible or radio inside, and I would put another vegetable on top.

VOM: How long did you have the radio before they found it?

Boun: They took five radios from me. I had some for as long as five or six months, but others broke quickly.

VOM: How about the Bibles? How many Bibles?

Boun: They took five Bibles, but I have owned six Bibles in the prison. They finally didn't care about the sixth one. I could read it openly; they didn't mind.

VOM: When you are listening to the radio, would you have to do it quietly?

Boun: I would listen to it under my mosquito net with headphones, and I would also put a blanket over me. When I listened to different Christian programs, my heart was refreshed.

But when the new group of guards came, they found my Bible and burned it. Not all of it burned, and there were some parts left. I was mad, so I took it and read it openly, even though there were only small portions left. I didn't care about their feelings. I became angry and prayed, "Oh Lord, please punish them and let them know that you are the highest."

[In the years following Boun's prayer, the chief of police died from a liver virus, and four other guards were imprisoned for stealing and drug dealing.]

Boun: During my last year in prison, the guards drank heavily after killing a cow. A captain forgot his gun at my bed, and I saw it and was scared. What should I do? If I take the gun to the office, they might accuse me of something I didn't do. I decided to show the gun to one of the guards, saying, "Sir, I found this gun. Someone came into my hut and forgot about it." The guard said, "Look at the number. Oh, this is Captain Pornchai's gun." A message was sent to the captain to come see me, but he said, "Boun wants to meet me?" He was angry. "Why does this prisoner dare to call me? Why does he need to meet me?" But the guard urged him on. He was very mad when he came to me. "What do you want from me?" he demanded. I said, "Is this your gun?" And then, his attitude changed. "Oh thank you. Thank you. Good. Thank you. Thank you very much," the captain said while kneeling on the floor. "Oh thank you that you didn't take this gun to the colonel. You have saved my life. You saved my job. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you." He shook my hands. He asked me what I wanted to eat. He asked me what he could do for me.

VOM: The captain, he really got down on his knees?

Boun: Yes, he deserved to lose his job because he lost his gun.

In January of this year, a chief of the prison said to me, "Your family is so strong in their faith that Christianity has spread everywhere. That is why you remain here. We will not let you out because your family still spreads the Gospel. If you want to be released, go back home, drink and play and join the party like us — that is the best thing for a man in this world — don't live like you have. Stop believing in your faith or you will remain poor. Many believers who grow poorer and poorer end up not believing at all."

But I knew that I only had a short amount of time left in prison. I said to him, "If you stop worshiping the cement idol, if you stop worshiping the gold or bronze idol, then I will stop worshiping my God. You won't stop. Why do you force me to stop?"

In 2010, I was forced to clean the police toilet at the camp. I had to carry water very far. I used two baskets to carry the water put into the toilet. I did this every day for eight months.

One day around that time, I fell because I am old and was carrying very heavy baskets of water. There was a pain in my back, and I tried to stand up but fell down into the stream. The police

mocked me saying, “Hey, why don’t you call on your God to give you strength?”

VOM: So when the soldier and police mocked you about your faith, why did you just keep quiet?

Boun: I was afraid that they would do something violent. I have seen the guards shoot at other prisoners that try to say something in response. They don’t shoot you, but instead scare you. They shoot at you and make you pay five dollars for each bullet.

On Sept. 3, 2010, the police told me that they received a letter from America and Canada, but I was never allowed to see it. Still, they put me in a small room without food for 10 days because of that letter. I had 10 days without food or water, but I stayed in that room for one month and 15 days.

VOM: So one time, when your name was said on the Voice of America radio program, it encouraged you a lot. Then this time it caused you some serious problems.

Boun: I sent a message to my wife to find out where the letter was. She tried, but she couldn’t find anything. But they said that they had the letter, and they put me in the small room for a month and fifteen days. I also had to pay a 200,000 kip [approximately \$25] fine when I was released.

Before I was released from prison, the high official in charge of the prison said to me, “If you are released, stop your belief. Don’t believe at all. Do not get anything, and don’t go anywhere. Don’t communicate with other Christians, or you will get nothing.” I was released within three months after that.

VOM: You don’t seem like angry or bitter about being in the prison. Were you angry about having to be there?

Boun: I don’t feel regret, but on the other hand, I give thanks to the Lord. Even in prison, I knew that God was with me, and I knew what he had done for me on the cross. It is greater than what I have been through in prison.

VOM: What was the time that you felt the lowest or when was it the most difficult? What was the worse time for you?

Boun: The worst time was from 1999 to 2001 — about three or four years — because in that time, I didn’t have a Bible. I was also just a new believer, but I still had peace in my heart. When I got a Bible or radio, I would read and listen to grow my faith every day.

VOM: So during that time when you didn’t have anything at all. Why did you stay faithful to God?

Boun: I remember something I heard on the radio. The speaker said that our Lord is the God who created the world, the universe. When I remembered his words, I would think about the earth, the stars and the moon, and I saw the glory of God. How great God is! If no one can create them, how can they exist? When I look at them, I see that they are real. It comforts me and supports me and caused me to depend on my faith during that time.

VOM: Can you tell me a little bit what the prison looked like? Describe the dark room.

Boun: It was built with big stones and with cement, but the door is metal with a little hole like a window. At 11:30 a.m., a guard would open the window and drop in the food. Then later at 3 p.m., the door was opened and more food dropped in. Other than that, I didn't know what time of day it was. Thank God that the door was made of metal. There was a small hole from rust. I would stand up and put my nose on the hole and breathe fresh air.

VOM: If someone tells your story to Christians around the world, is there anything that you want to say to the people who prayed for you?

Boun: I was in jail. I know how hard the life is, but I want to encourage believers in America to be strong in their faith. I know many Americans have not accepted Jesus Christ yet, but you have the freedom to proclaim Jesus and share the Gospel. Go evangelize in the name of Jesus because you can. You have the right to read the Bible, to pray and go to church. Please, do that.

Please pray for my country, that God will change the country to be the land of the Lord. Pray that everyone accepts Jesus Christ because I know that nothing is worthy in this life except becoming a Christian and following Jesus Christ.

Thank you to my brothers and sisters in America, Canada and many other countries for your faithful prayer. I know that I am still alive today because of your faithful prayer. I am now sharing my testimony because of your powerful prayer.

Please pray for my life from now on. When I am alive, I want my life to glorify our Lord's kingdom. I want to share the Gospel and do good things to glorify him. Pray for me. Pray for my family to minister, and pray that God will provide what we need.