

The Free Gift

by Frank Houtz

The Fredrickt family, missionaries to Ghana, decided to send their 17 year old son to the United States to attend a Christian college. Hans was a mature young man who desired to return to the mission field after graduating from college. While attending college he met a young lady whose family had served as missionaries in the Truk Islands of the South Pacific. Shelly was also seeking the Lord's will for her life and hoping to be involved in missions. Hans attempted to get to know Shelly, first through group socials, then later by asking her to accompany him on dates. Shelly was a really romantic young lady. She read many Christian Romance novels and had a good understanding of morals, and Christ's desire for dating couples. A strong conviction that certain things were sacred for marriage kept this young couple from many of the common sins of youth.

One day Hans proposed to Shelly. He presented her a diamond ring which he had spent quite a sum for. Since he was in college at that time, he was only able to work when he was not in class, so the ability to save up the considerable sum needed for purchasing this diamond was difficult and it was with considerable sacrifice that he offered her this diamond ring. Often, when both sets of parents are involved in ministries, the children have to support themselves while in college. This means that when the time comes for an engagement ring it will require both the boy and the girl to work hard to pay for it. However, Hans had worked hard, done without luxuries that many would call necessities, to enable him to purchase this cherished gift for his love. Shelly did not have to pay a dime for the ring, and was not even aware of his sacrifice until he presented it to her. She was rightfully swayed by his affections, recognized a worthy suitor and excitedly received the gift.

They were engaged until he could finish college, and then they planned their wedding. The pastor of their congregation would not perform a marriage ceremony without giving proper Christian counseling prior to the marriage. They went through the counseling. Both, being raised in Christian homes on the mission field, had a strong foundation, so all looked to be going well.

The minister felt the couple were ready and agreed to do the service. It was a typical formal church wedding with lots of guests. The bride was dressed in white as she deserved since she had remained pure for the occasion. They were sent off on their honeymoon in great splendor and by all appearances this marriage was well on its way to a successful, happy, until death do us part commitment.

All seemed fine for the first couple of years. They acted like two love birds, doing quite a bit of flirting in public. However, like most couples, the problems were not broadcast at first. Most people probably knew of no problems at all until the divorce papers were filed in the local courts. When it was published in the papers, most people were in shock. It seemed like

a match made in heaven, but the true story sounds more like a trip to hell. What was the problem? Did he beat her? Was she a nagging type? They had no children, could this be the problem? Did one want children and the other not? The problem did manifest itself with no children, but it was not that one wanted them and the other did not. The problem was that they had never consummated their marriage. Yes, there was flirting in public, but nothing in private. She had refused any relations from the very beginning.

What was the problem? Had she been so ingrained by the Victorian concepts of the evils of sex, that when in the proper setting she was unable to go through with the act? Was it that he could not fulfill the expectations brought about by the reading of unrealistic Christian romance novels? Was it that she never really desired this man and could never bring herself to break off with him before the marriage for fear of hurting him? These questions might only be answered by Shelly, and truthfully, I doubt she could answer them.

Shelly did many irrational things at this time. One of these irrational actions was that she had an affair. This was a girl so concerned with purity that she could not have the proper godly relationship with her husband, but then later had an affair just to prove she was capable. After this action, her extremely patient husband reluctantly decided divorce was the only option. In choosing this option, most of the missions boards would not accept him, and the denomination in which he was ordained to preach would not allow him to preach or serve in the leadership.

I have done considerable teaching in the past years concerning the Law of God. Many Christians get uneasy when the law is mentioned. It comes from their training. For centuries many in Christianity have taught that the Law of God (usually called the law of Moses) has been done away with, and is no longer applicable to the Christian. I cannot tell you how many times I have heard about the free gift of God. There is a gift given by God, and God requires nothing of us to receive this gift. The question is, "What is this free gift?" Most answer this as *salvation* without any requirement placed on the benefactor to receive it. *Salvation* is then defined as, "going to heaven when we die instead of going to hell." *No requirement* is defined as, "not having to do any of the Old Testament law that is not repeated in the New Testament."

Salvation would better be defined as, "being delivered from the terrible consequences about to happen." If I were about to step on a land mine and a person shoved me away and stopped me from stepping on it, I would state that this person saved me. This salvation was from the trauma I would have experienced by stepping on the land mine. This trauma could be anything from maiming to death. To obey God's laws is the only way to totally circumvent the consequences of not obeying God's laws. One may be forgiven for breaking a command, and one might later spend eternity with God, however, forgiveness and eternity are separate issues from the consequences of not obeying a particular law. If lying causes unbelief and distrust, then only honesty will provoke credibility and trust. One may have been a terrible liar prior to God revealing Himself as savior from the eternal death. This salvation from the eternal death does not mean that throughout the rest of one's life that one

will never have to deal with the consequences of his life as a liar. People still will not trust this one until he forms a new reputation of honesty. Paul was still feared as a persecutor of Christians long after he had joined the Christian movement and ceased his violence toward them.

Salvation actually includes choosing the set of rules by which you wish to be guided. You will follow a set of rules even if *you* make them all up and anything goes. When *you* make them up, you are then governed by your own desires, and your desires rule over you. Sounds great until you start suffering from those natural consequences brought about by your *desire-guided* actions. So if we have to do something after we are saved, what is the free gift? I started this topic with a story about Hans and Shelly due to God's analogy in Scripture concerning the bride. When Hans proposed to Shelly, her *free gift* was a ring. This was a gift given to Shelly signifying a promise and a desire.

The giving of a ring is not a Biblical custom, but the custom in Bible times was much like it. During that time the young man would present the gift to the hopeful bride which would include livestock, perfumes, precious metals, etc. Her acceptance of the gift included the agreement to many unstated but understood conditions. Her acceptance to marriage included taking the man's ancestral tribe as her own.¹ It included submitting to his rule over her, his spiritual authority, and being satisfied with what he provided to sustain life. It was not just the 3 cattle, 18 sheep, 2 camels, and the 12 shekels of silver that she was accepting. In fact the purpose of the dowry was so that she would have something if he ever divorced her. Should he divorce her, she was to go out with the dowry which she brought into the marriage. A young lady was not allowed to accept her suitor's gift then go on about her own business seeking out another partner. This was adultery and she would be stoned for this.

Richard Maybury in his book *Whatever Happened to Penny Candy?*, a book used to teach economics to young people, invents the word *tanstaafl*. *Tanstaafl* is defined as, "There ain't no such thing as a free lunch." When someone advertises a free gift, that gift cost someone something. Maybe the gift cost the recipient nothing, but it cost someone something. The giver either bought it, made it, or stole it. If they bought it, it cost money, if they made it, it cost labor, and if they stole it, it cost someone else either money or labor. Mr. Maybury is right, "there ain't no such thing as a free lunch." The phrase *free gift* is stating the recipient did not pay for it. The gift for the bride cost her nothing, however there was a price paid. The groom paid the price. This giving of the gift was the earnest, a promise to fulfill the

¹ In biblical times if the bride was from the tribe of Benjamin, and the groom was from the tribe of Judah, after the marriage the bride would be considered from the tribe of Judah. All the children would also be considered of the tribe of Judah. This is where the present custom of the wife taking the surname of the husband's family at marriage. It is an acceptance of the tribe of the husband.

covenant being cut. The covenant is not completed by giving the earnest. The covenant is not complete until after the covenant ceremony, some blood is shed and all the written and implied conditions are completed.

The story is told of a dictator who wished to conquer a kingdom. To do so he devised a plan. He sent the king of the land he wished to conquer a white elephant. White elephants were considered very rare and would be thought to be of great value. The king ruled in a far northern climate where vegetation was somewhat scarce and elephants unknown. The king was very proud of this gift from a foreign dictator and showed it to all the distinguished visitors to his country. However, an elephant eats an incredible amount of food a day. The country did not provide lots of vegetation because of its climate. After a few years, the prized elephant was eating up the country's wealth. Before long the king was having to sacrifice his military in order to continue feeding this elephant. When he had sufficiently cut back on his military, the dictator who gave him the elephant attacked and took over the kingdom. This is where we get the phrase "White Elephant." It means that something cost more to maintain than the benefit one gets from it. All property has a maintenance cost. Owning something will cost you time and effort in caring for it. It is no different with the free gift God has given us. I do not wish to insinuate that God's gift to us is a white elephant. The value far exceeds the maintenance costs, but it does have its maintenance costs.

In the first story Shelly accepted the ring, but she evidently did not accept the responsibilities required for a marriage. She did not accept his authority nor did she accept her conjugal responsibility. She was not entering into a marriage covenant, but instead was accepting the diamond ring or the romantic notion of being married. There are many who are supposedly accepting the free gift of God when in reality, all they are accepting is "the ring" or the idea of being saved. This will end without them being the bride just as if they had not accepted anything at all. The acceptance of the marriage proposal is also an acceptance of His rule. Submission to a just and righteous authority is not bondage.

God has written plainly what He expects from us. He states that it is not hidden from us.² God informs us of what He expects prior to our entering into relationship with him. God's laws are duties given to those who enter into covenant with Him. This is not the entire relationship between Him and His people. When a woman marries a man, her relationship is not fulfilled in just doing what he says. There is communication, love, enjoying time together, going places together, and sticking it out through tough times. Trust, loyalty, common goals, working together and passion are all a part of a good relationship. God wants no less from us in our relationship with Him. Thus the law is in no way the entirety of our communion. The focus of keeping God's law should always be obedience because of love, after all, we accepted His rule. We should never use our actions as a way to manipulate God

²KJV Deuteronomy 30:11 For this commandment which I command thee this day, it *is* not hidden from thee, neither *is* it far off.

or think of them as a means by which we can gain salvation. It was a part of what we accepted when the free gift was offered.

In Jeremiah we read of how God dealt with Israel when she did not submit to His laws.

(NKJV Jeremiah 3:8) "Then I saw that for all the causes for which backsliding Israel had committed adultery, I had put her away and given her a certificate of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear, but went and played the harlot also.

The Lord divorced Israel for adultery, (following after the ways of the Gentiles). Israel had left the rule of the Lord and had sought after the dominion of another. When we choose another's laws rather than God's, we have participated in the same adulterous actions as Israel. Are we rejecting the free gift? Possibly so! We are rejecting the dominion rightfully belonging to the husband. So keeping the law is not the antithesis of a free gift, it is one proof that the bride is a participant in the marriage.

What is this free gift if there are requirements in this relationship after we receive it? Each one of us have been enslaved to the ways of this world. We were in bondage to sin, helplessly under that taskmaster's control. We sold ourselves into slavery. Adam was a perfectly created son of God, yet he sold himself out to another's control. In the years since, we have each individually followed Adam's example. God purchased us, as a slave, from this master called sin and will bring us into His palace as His perfected bride. The free gift was the redemptive price paid for the bride. This price bought the bride back from the nations where she had wandered. She was under another's authority because she had played the harlot. Yehoshua paid the price necessary to buy her out of the nations and return her to the rule of the father. He renewed the covenant³ given to our forefather Abraham who looked for a city with foundations, whose builder and maker is God.⁴ This is something that we were totally incapable of doing ourselves. It may even be impossible for us to recognize our need considering the condition in which we exist. People are usually happy with their false gods and pagan practices.

To not accept the full responsibility that comes with marriage is the rejection of this *free gift*. The *free gift* is the covenant price, a covenant that we could not make, nor could we institute it. The rule of God in our lives is the proof of the acceptance of this free gift.⁵ So

³ (NKJV Hebrews 8:8) "Because finding fault with them, He says: "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah" This word for *new* is the Greek word *diatheke*. It is not *new* as in something that has never been before. That type of new is the Greek word *neos*. This word *diatheke* means to renew, refresh, or replenish. Our English word *new* has the same connotation. We might say we have a new car after it comes from the body shop with a complete restoration.

⁴ Heb 11:10

⁵ (NKJV James 2:18) But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.

the antithesis of the acceptance of this free gift is the rejection of the commands laid down by a loving husband, and the reducing of an intimate relationship to a ceremonial observance where we go through the motions, but keep our distance.

With all analogies there tends to be a limit to their ability to communicate. When trying to apply the images given in this analogy one can be left with wrong impressions. The intent of this article is to show that the keeping of the law and the statement that God desires for us to keep the law is not in opposition to the free gift of God. When reviewing the illustration of the couple one might conclude that the intent of this analogy is to show how one can lose their salvation. The question comes, "Is this a divorce, or is it an annulment?" An annulment is stating the marriage never happened. How could a marriage have happened when the covenant was not consummated? In this illustration it seems that there was no marriage from the beginning.

Does this mean that one has to accept that the law is for Christians today in order for them to be a child of God? No, confessing that one believes the law is for the Christian is irrelevant to their being a child of God. Many people obey the law without even knowing that they do. Some do not obey certain sections of the law because they believe it is not required. This does not mean they have rejected the rule of their husband, it only means they have misunderstood the directions. Many people can have wonderful marriages even with considerable misunderstanding. When a husband is misunderstood, his giving grace to his wife concerning the misunderstanding does not negate the original command. If he changed his mind grace would not be needed, it just meant he came to realize that his wife's mistake was really the correct thing to do. Grace is needed when the mistake was not the correct thing to do but she was loved and forgiven for her error.

There will be those who believe they are doing exactly what the Lord intends, yet they were never sons of God. (NKJV Matthew 7:22) "Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?'" Many in the church claim these very demonstrations of their faith is proof of their position. There is one phrase **not** used in this verse, "Lord, Lord have we not obeyed your commands or kept your laws?" Again, this is not the litmus paper to test to see if one is in submission to God, but searching in one's life for ways that we can better be in line with the commands that He has given us is **definitely not** the proof of our rebellion to Him either. The problem comes when we spend time searching other's lives so we can determine their position with God.

The truth is, Christians spend too much time attempting to find out who else is the bride. We put innumerable qualifications on whom we will accept as being the sons of God, and we spend hours arguing over who is in, and who is not. This is no more than a futile attempt to put one's self in control. We think by all our categorizing that we are actually defining what God will allow and what God will not. It would do us all good to realize that God is the sovereign of this world and He will do what He intends without regard to our agreement or permission. We should spend our time discerning what God desires of us, and choosing to

obey Him in our actions, rather than looking to see if everyone else is acting properly. We should concentrate on our own actions rather than determining whether someone else is truly a *Son of God* by their inability to act as we think he should. The correctness of the judgment becomes irrelevant if we were not called to be the judges. The husband will determine to his own satisfaction who acted properly as the bride. He also will determine who was the bride and who just thought they were.

Part II

The Scriptural Basis to the Phrase “Free Gift”.

Once we have reviewed the theories concerning the Free gift, it would help us to ask some additional questions and look in Scripture to determine why so much has been taught on the subject and if its emphasis is valid. When reviewing the English translations of the New Testament, looking for the use of the term *free gift*, I find an interesting piece of information. The word pair only appears 3 times in the KJV, NKJV, YLT, and an additional time in ASV, RSV, and the NRS. In the group where it is written only three times all of them are in the same chapter within a few verses of each other. The other group includes one verse in the next chapter which refers back to the previous three mentioned verses. So all of the usages of this popular phrase come from one small section of the Bible. This section is Romans 5:15-18, with the additional usage from Romans 6:23. Let us look at these verses with additional verses for context.

(NKJV Romans 5:12) Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned -- {NKJV Genesis 2:17 "but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."} 13 (For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. 14 Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come. 15 But the free gift *is* not like the offense. For if by the one man's offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many. 16 And the gift *is* not like *that which came* through the one who sinned. For the judgment *which came* from one *offense resulted* in condemnation, but the free gift *which came* from many offenses *resulted* in justification. 17 For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.)

18 Therefore, as through one man's offense *judgment* came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act *the free gift came* to all men, resulting in justification of life. 19 For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous. 20 Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, 21 so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

I have inserted after verse 12 a verse from Genesis. This records God informing Adam what will result from eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Adam is told that death will result. We know that he soon succumbed to peer pressure and ate of this tree which resulted with Adam's death and the death of the following generations. Then the dialogue actually jumps down to verse 18 to continue the thought. The verses in between (13 through 17) are explaining the statement just made in 12, much like my inserting of the Genesis verse. It is unclear if these verses were written by Paul, or some early scribe copied them into the text after getting a copy of Romans with someone's notes. Long explanations of things stated in the text or short ones that the original readers would probably already know are usually later additions. There are several of these in the New Testament however, we can not be sure which are additions and which were explanations by the original writer since they occurred so early, they were copied into the text by the scribes of that day. I happen to be very fond of these verses and see no conflict with the rest of Scripture. They are some of my favorite verses since it makes very clear a doctrine that I think to be basic to understanding what Yehoshua was sent to do. It is interesting that two of the three times *free gift* is used, it is within these parentheses. The third time is in verse 18 yet in this verse *free gift* is in italics. In the KJV and NKJV this means that it is not really in the Greek text. It has been added to refer back to the earlier mentioning of the phrase because the translators thought that this is what was being spoken about, and that the English would require the repetition of this phrase when the Greek did not. This clearly leaves us with only two times this phrase is used in the versions following the Textus Receptus.

After years of reading this text I discovered a question that I had passed over with every reading. I would not be surprised to find out that you might pass over it too. What question would we pass over? Well for the curious, here is the Passover question. What makes this gift different from all other gifts? It occurred to me that all gifts are free. People do not bring you a birthday gift then send you a bill in the mail for it. You do not take the new family next door a house warming gift and then ask for payment. In fact the only time when one expects to pay for a gift is when a free gift is advertised on television, or a telephone marketer has called offering a free gift. This term immediately lets us know there is a purpose that the speaker is attempting to get across that is not openly being stated. Usually this is a manipulative statement attempting to over emphasize the importance of particular deed, namely I the salesman am giving you a free gift, thus you are indebted to me to buy an

outrageously priced thing that I sell. Has Paul resorted to such tactics? This technique would belittle the work of Messiah by assuming he needed to manipulate people to make them desire Yehoshua's *free gift*. Would Paul resort to such manipulative techniques? This question caused me to begin to research the Greek and ask more questions. Why was *free* added to this sentence when it is only redundant and manipulative?

Upon reviewing the Greek new questions arose. The following is the definition of the Greek word from the Strong's Greek Concordance. Following the word with the heading "Usage:" is the way it is translated throughout the KJV of the Bible.

χάρισμα charisma {khar'-is-mah} from 5483; a (divine) *gratuity*, i.e. *deliverance* (from danger or passion); (spec.) a (spiritual) *endowment*, i.e. (Subj.) *Relig. qualification*, or (obj.) *Miraculous faculty*;-- (free) gift.

Usage: AV - gift 15, free gift 2; 17

The word is *charisma*, a word many are familiar with because of the title of a movement in the 70's and 80's called the *Charismatic Movement*. This movement emphasized the gifts of the spirit, thus its adherents Anglicized the Greek word for gift and named the movement after it. Here is the interesting note concerning these verses, there is no word *free* in any of these verses. Only the word *charisma*, meaning gift. The word *free* has been added by the English translators. Thus it is not Paul attempting to manipulate people. It is the translators wishing to emphasize the idea of not having to pay for anything. This is similar to what Martin Luther did when in his translation of the New Testament he added the word "only" after the word "faith" to drive home his argument against the Catholic church's practice concerning indulgences.⁶ Someone may have been trying to drive home the idea that the gift given by Messiah is without cost to the receiver. It seems this has opened up the Scripture for all kinds of interpretation as to what this *free* applies. That is especially interesting since the word *free* is not even there.

There is nothing different about the use of *charisma* in these verses from any other time it is used in the New Testament that would give reason for the word *free* to be added specifically to this text. If your father gave you a birthday gift, would you then think that your

⁶ (Ephesians 2:8 worded somewhat like Luther translated this verse in his German translation of Ephesians) "For by grace you have been saved through faith only, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God," This was Luther's attempt to refute the doctrine of indulgences taught by the Roman Catholic Church. The Catholics would withhold the sacrament of communion from a wayward member until a time of punishment had been completed. This punishment was considered to pay for the infraction. After the payment, the believer was reinstated into full communion with the rest of the assembly. Since Luther and the Roman Catholics agreed that the sacrament of communion was actually the body of Christ, and without the body of Christ no one could be saved, it could be inferred that the Roman Priests were withholding salvation until a price had been paid by the sinner. Luther did not believe that communion should ever be withheld thus he felt free to add the word only after the word faith, to emphasize the lack of need for the indulgences.

reception of it required you **not** to obey his commands; even if by giving this gift it showed some forgiveness of a past infraction? In like manner, a gift from anyone should not require you to break the law. Only if it were an illegal gift would there be strings attached such as that. There is nothing in these verses that hints at eliminating the law. The law is used to show the need for the gift that Messiah gave. I would assume the law is as capable today to point out the need for Messiah's gift as it was 2000 years ago. However, once we discover the need for Messiah's gift, there still continually remain the requirements. The discovery does not circumvent the Law, it only lets us know we need to be perfected, and continues to let us know where we fail.