

UPWARD CALL

Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but this is my one aim: to forget everything that's behind, and to strain every nerve to go after what lies ahead. I press on toward the finish line, where the prize waiting for me is the upward call of God
IN KING JESUS.

(Philippians 3:13-14)

#09-1510

by – Stuart H. Pouliot

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When Were You Saved?

I was having a phone conversation with a good friend of many years. It has been a great relationship as we help each other break out of the box of tradition. As such, we can challenge one another with new thoughts and not become defensive or cranky, so to speak. Well, on this particular day, I asked my friend: *When were you saved?* He responded the typical Christian way, to which I responded: *No, you weren't!* There was a silent pause on the other end of the line, and I could tell his hamster was rolling around in the cage, wondering what I was up to. Then, as if a light bulb went on, he had the answer. Hold on; we will get to it after some commentary.

It is quite common for Christians to share with one another their "salvation experience," that is, when *they got saved*. The ones that always seem to take center stage are those who were miraculously delivered out of something like drugs, alcohol, or other addictions. Yet, there are others who from their very early childhood believed. Some recall *asking Jesus into their heart* as a four-year old or at some other early age, and others have no recall, as if they believed straight out of the womb. Some recall the great need they felt deep inside the day they "got saved," and others felt no great need; their eyes were simply opened and their life changed.

The point is that there are as many different testimonies as there are Christians; everyone has a story to tell from the miraculous to the mundane, but they are all testimonies nonetheless. If they were all categorized by similarity, there would be common threads, no doubt, running through many of them. However, looking at all the various categories or groupings, it would become clear that there is no one formula, technique, or mystical word that runs through them. The fact of the matter is that if we were honest, in a non-religious, non-doctrinal assessing way, we would conclude that salvation experiences are all over the map and do not often follow what we think is the correct scriptural pattern, at least as we have been taught from the pulpit. Let's carry this thought even further; based on some mainstream, traditionalist doctrine, some of these people are not saved. After all, they didn't do the right things "to get themselves saved." We will come back to this.

I am in no way challenging anyone's experience or testimony. They are real and valid to each and every one of us, and they are an important part and, to most of us, the highpoint of our personal history. They are watershed or hallmark moments in our lives. Those who believed from their most early days may not have specific time and day moments they can point back to, but where in scripture are we told we must have such a thing, especially to validate our salvation? It's not to be found. This latter group is highlighted because they often seem to get lost in the conversation when believers go around the room, so to speak, sharing their testimonies.

Listening to testimonies, there are common threads woven into many of them, as evidenced in the phraseology used in describing the so-called *salvation experience*. The four most common expressions are: *When I made a decision for Christ*; or *When I asked Jesus into my heart*; or *When I prayed the sinner's prayer*; or *When I confessed Jesus as Lord*. There is a fifth one that, although not stated directly, is often implied and goes along with confessing Jesus as Lord: *When I exercised my free will and believed*. These are often presented as if they are the exact moment of salvation or deliverance. Strangely, except for confessing Jesus as Lord, these are not found in scripture, and yet they are repeated over and over again as if they are Christian doctrine. Consider all the "I's" involved in these expressions; it sure sounds like they saved themselves or, at least, they had a part in being their own savior. Can the flesh save? Asking Jesus into one's heart does not save; praying the sinner's prayer does not save; confessing with the mouth Jesus as Lord does not save; and exercising so-called *free will* does not save.

See *Whose Will Saves—God's or Man's?* — <http://www.kingdomandglory.com/art/art33.pdf>

As the Savior of all mankind, Jesus alone saves from beginning to end. He even gives us His own faith to believe, so that, initially, it is not our faith. It is all of grace. Does confessing Jesus as Lord and believing in our heart save us? Yes, but only in the context of salvation *not* being a one-shot instantaneous deal. We *are saved* (Acts 15:11; 1 Corinthians 15:2), we *are being saved* (1 Corinthians 1:18; 2 Corinthians 2:15), and we *will be saved* (Romans 10:9; 11:26; 1 Corinthians 3:15). Our testimonies must confirm what the Savior *alone* has done and not what we think we did to make it happen. Most of these expressions are simply Christian-speak to line up with the tradition of men that I would call *Christian performance standards*, as if they are necessary to validate the experience or to prove we are saved. I recall the day that a very traditionalist woman was literally aghast when I told her that, when Jesus broke into my life, my eyes were opened to see Him as conqueror and king of the entire universe. If I could have read her mind, I am sure she was saying: *This man is not saved.*

This leads me to the expression that I always use to describe the day my eyes were opened to who Jesus truly is. The expression I use is ***when Jesus broke into my life***. This is what He literally did in my life. One day, He showed up and everything began to change. I had nothing to do with it; it is like He grabbed hold of me. I didn't grab Him; He did it all, including giving me His faith. In recalling past conversations, I don't think anyone has ever asked me to explain this expression when I have used it in such a personal way. By the way; I have never heard anyone else use this expression either, except perhaps one, Paul the apostle of the nations. He didn't use the exact words, but he did use ones very similar to describe the appearing of the Lord on the road to Damascus: *I was laid hold of (apprehended) by Christ Jesus* (Philippians 3:12). Another way of stating this is: *I was seized; forcefully grasped and taken control of by Christ Jesus.*

Let's get to the bottom line of all this. Jesus is the Savior of the world; and the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world; and the one who is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world; and the man who gave Himself as a ransom for all; and the one who died for us all while we were yet in our sins; and through His one act of righteousness, there resulted justification of life to all men. In these and many more verses, do you see anyone in the whole wide world doing anything to bring about this great work of salvation? Absolutely not! Jesus is the Savior, and, by definition, a savior must save or deliver people who are totally and unequivocally unable to save themselves. If they could, then they would be saviors and have no need for the Savior. Many know this is true and would not dare to claim they saved themselves, but the question is this: If so, then why do so many seem to indicate they saved themselves when they asked Jesus into their heart, or exercised their free will to believe, or walked the aisle, or whatever they did or said when Jesus broke into their life?

Now, let us return to the opening question: When were you saved? My friend responded with glee: *Before the foundation of the world.* Yes!! Using a slightly different expression, we all were saved *from the disruption of the world.* How could this be? Because the Lamb was slain from the disruption of the world (Revelation 13:8)!

The simple and yet most profound answer is that the perfect sacrificial Lamb, the Son of God, was slain from the disruption of the world as we know it. Salvation was a done deal before things even got started. It was and is the plan to achieve God's purpose of *All in all*. Names have been written in the book of life from the disruption of the world (Revelation 17:8); and the saints were chosen in Him (Christ, the Savior) before the disruption of the world (Ephesians 1:4), meaning they were saved not only from the disruption but before it; and the so-called *salvation experiences* are simply eyes of the heart-opening confirmations of something that has already been accomplished by the Savior from the very beginning. But there is more; for God's plan from the very beginning has been and continues to be to save all mankind, for this is what man's Savior does. ***In Christ all shall be made alive!*** It's all in the timing—God's timing. For some, confirmation comes at a young age; for others, it comes later in life, during our present age—and, for most, it will come by God's fire in the ages to come. *Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord* (1 Corinthians 1:31).

So, if you know you are saved, then your testimony is that you were saved before the disruption (or, foundation) of the world (or, orderly arrangement). Think about it; you don't need performance standards or Christian-speak to prove it, or even a testimony, for that matter. It is a fact to declare! Better yet, just live this new life, the new creation life in Jesus and others will know you are different. Jesus' life is your testimony. Now, this is truly good news!