

SERIES: WE ARE FREE (A Study of Galatians)

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TITLE: Living By Faith

Inclusion - we talk a lot about inclusion in the United States today. Perhaps in your part of the world, you're involved in the discussions of inclusion. What's the big deal? Why is inclusion so important? Well, I think it's really quite obvious. For years, people have felt excluded from mainstream life. Many people felt pushed aside or rejected because of their lifestyle, or their behavior, or some other reason, so schools and organizations are doing inclusion training. Granted, the inclusion training we see around us today may not actually be benefiting us. It may be harming us as a society. But it might surprise you that God has His own inclusion provision. And that's what we want to talk about today.

So let's turn back to the Bible, to Galatians Chapter Three. In the first 3 verses, Paul has continued his assault on a false gospel. And he did this by asking 3 rhetorical questions. The essence of the questions was, are you saved by your actions, or saved by the grace of God? The Galatians churches know the answer. The answer is by grace, and not by works. But God's grace was not just meant for His Chosen People, the Jewish nation. God's grace is inclusive. And that's what we want to talk about beginning in verse six (ESV):

Paul says, “[just as Abraham ‘believed God, and it was counted him as righteousness’](#)”.

What he is doing is quoting Genesis 15:6. Okay, but there's got to be some reason why these Judaizers were holding to the Law for Salvation. Well, what they were doing is what we kind of do. We take outward symbols and translate them into salvific means. What am I talking about? Well, think about what happened with Abraham. Abraham is minding his business, and God called him and said, “Go”. God says, “Leave your land, and I will make you and your name great”. So he does go, and he's given a promise that God will multiply his lineage. However, his wife was barren. Abraham took steps into his own hands for a time, and does things as he sees fit. Eventually, he would trust God, and God would make a great nation through him. But in Genesis 17:10, it says, “[This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between you and me and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised.](#)”

So Abraham and the people of God were called to cut away the foreskin, as a sign of the cutting away of sin from the heart. It was a physical action, symbolic of their need for cleansing. But here's the problem: That symbol became a piece of their legalism. They could easily point back to Genesis 15:6 and say, “No, Abraham was saved by his faith, and not from the act of circumcision”.

And you see, we do this today with Christianity. We point to Ephesians 2, and we say, “Look - Salvation comes by grace through faith alone, and not of works.” Paul is very clear, but then we tack on other means of Salvation: “Get baptized; be sure you get Communion; be sure you get to confess your sins; be sure you do your tithe; or, go to church.” We keep adding works to Salvation.

Now listen to me. Ephesians 2:10 says, “*we were saved for good works... ..so that we should walk in them*”. In Jesus’ Great Commission (Mat 28:19-20), He said, *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, teaching them to obey all that I have commanded them, and baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit*. We also see the breaking of the bread – Communion – a time to remember. But here's the deal: none of those things saves us. They are evidence of our Salvation. They are issues of obedience to our Savior, Lord, and King. But God is clear - Salvation in the Old Testament, and the New Testament, and today, and in the future, only comes by one way - by grace through faith. This is the point Paul is hitting home.

These Judaizers were saying “No, you have to observe the Law. You must be circumcised.” But in Romans Chapter 4, Paul says, “Wrong. God's Chosen People, the true Jews, are those who have faith in Him and therefore follow Him.” You see, cutting off the foreskin on your body does nothing to save. It does not impress God, and it does not make you His child. A repentant heart that leads to Salvation, by grace through faith, is what makes you His child. It’s not the cutting away of your foreskin, not following the Law, not getting dunked in a tank, or any other action. Salvation comes by grace through faith alone.

Here in verse 6, Paul says that that faith was counted to Abraham's righteousness. The King James Version, which I actually like better, says “accounted to”. It has the idea of accounting. It's taking one person's ledger, and dropping it into another person’s. This is what we call the Doctrine of Imputation.

Now that's a big topic, but simply put, the Doctrine of Imputation simply means, someone's righteousness, or someone's sinfulness, is credited to our account. So as human beings, we come from Adam. Adam sinned, so his sinfulness is credited to our account. We start off life with a negative in our spiritual bank account, but God imputes - or credits - Christ's righteousness to us. You see, **that's the Doctrine of Imputation - because we turn from our sin and turn to Christ, God takes Jesus' bank account and puts it in ours, and therefore, we are declared righteous**. So again, because of what Christ has done, we are free. **What is it that Christ has done? He is God in the flesh - He came to Earth and He lived a perfect life. He was crucified, buried, and He rose again. He appeared before 500 people and more; He ascended to Heaven, and now reigns on the throne. Because of what King Jesus did, we are saved. Because of King Jesus, we are free.**

King Jesus sets us free - not because of what we have done, but because of what Christ has done. Abraham was declared righteous by faith, and so are we.

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Paul continues in Galatians 3:7 (ESV):

⁷ Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham.

So this is probably quite a shocking statement from Paul. What he is saying is, unbelieving Jews are lesser sons of Abraham, than Gentiles who are saved. I think everything he would have said until now would have irritated them and been problematic. But this statement probably offended them beyond all measure. Salvation has nothing to do with works. Yes, circumcision was a sign of the covenant. It identified you as a Jew. But it did nothing to save them. It was an outward symbol of an inward reality. And Paul says, “I hate to break it to you, but if you deny the Gospel of Jesus Christ, you're not really a son of Abraham. You may be by lineage, but that doesn't save. The Gentiles who believe are now in the inheritance Of God. They are more sons of Abraham than you.” Scandalous statement, but Paul's not done. Verse 8:

⁸ And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.” ⁹ So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. (Vs. 8-9, ESV)

Paul says, “and the Scripture”. This is kind of an exposition on Genesis 12:3 and 18:18. Genesis 12:3 (NIV) says that *all peoples on earth will be blessed through you*. Genesis 18:18 (ESV, paraphrased) says that *all nations shall be blessed in him*. You see, Paul recognizes God's inclusion provision, which say that ALL people have the opportunity to be saved. Paul is making it clear that Salvation has always come one way, and that is, by faith. Granted, we know that in the time of Abraham, Jesus Christ had not yet died on the cross. However, that faith in God's provision was a down payment - or almost like a credit card transaction - that would be paid in full in the future.

Again, Paul is just building upon his case. You don't get saved by circumcision. You don't get saved by works of the flesh. You're not God's child because you were born in a Jewish household. **How are you saved? *By grace through faith*. Therefore, *any person can experience Salvation*. The Good News is *not just for the Jews*; it is *not just for the Gentiles*. It is truly Good News, because it is offered to *everyone*. It is INCLUSIVE!**

It doesn't matter how old you are or how young you are. It doesn't matter what part of the world you live in. It doesn't matter what century you live in. It doesn't matter if you're red and yellow, black and white – all people are precious in God's sight. This is where God's inclusion begins, but it's also where it ends.

Today there are movements that say Jesus Christ offers Salvation to *everyone*, and therefore they will be saved, whether they want it or they don't; whether they believe or not. The question is, “Is that, in fact, true?” Well, we want to be engaged in God's Word, so we have to go back to the Bible for the answer. We know from passages like Romans 14:11, that a day will come when every person will bow and recognize God is God. But this does not teach that every person will be saved. They will, as Romans 1 says, stop “suppressing the truth” and acknowledge truth for what it is, but they will not change their minds.

Jesus says in John 14:6 (ESV), "...I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." There is no other way to God but through Jesus Christ.

Paul says in Romans 10:9-10, "if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth, one confesses and is saved." There must be a change of heart. There must be both an inward and outward expression of belief in both the salvific power and the authority of Christ.

If everyone made it to Heaven, then what do we do with passages like Revelation 21:8, which says, "But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death."?

Or what do you do with Jesus' teaching that those who reject him go to eternal fire, or eternal punishment, or eternal destruction? Do you realize that Jesus talked more about Hell than He did Heaven? It's true. God has a provision of inclusion, but He will never force anyone into the Kingdom when they have said "No", indefinitely.

Now is it true that God calls all people to be saved? Is predestination a reality? Does God show mercy to whom he shows mercy to? Absolutely. How does that work with our free will? I have no idea, but these concepts are all taught in Scripture. So it's true that God offers Salvation to every person. The question is, will they believe?

The question that we have to wrestle with right now is, what should we do with this reality? I think first, we worship God because of His great love for us. He offers us Salvation, and He makes us His children. Therefore, He deserves our worship.

Second, I believe this reality should motivate us to go and share the Good News. God has called us to be ambassadors to the world around us. Christ said, "while going, make disciples, teaching them to obey all I've commanded." Therefore, we go. We share the message of the Good News with our neighbors, our coworkers, and anyone else He puts in our path. The Gospel is inclusive, because it is Good News for the atheist, the agnostic, the Jew, The Muslim, the Buddhist, the Hindu, the Mormon, the Jehovah's Witness, and the list goes on and on.

With Good News like that, how can we do anything but go?

N: Now, let's bring in Arnie Cole and Cara Whitney. As people who came to Christ as adults, did you think of God as inclusive?

C: I guess I didn't even really think about it. I thought at some point I reached a place where I had blown it, or I was created for bad. So I didn't look at it as inclusive or exclusive, but more like God was this old man in the sky, and each of us had a fate that we had no control over.

A: Yeah. I'm with Cara. I never really thought of God as being inclusive or exclusive. It's just those kinds of things never crossed my mind.

N: I think a lot of people today don't necessarily think about it being for one people group. But I do think people do fall into this game of the religious battle, and the game of religion, meaning, "I'm probably too bad for God, and so, that's where His inclusivity ends". In other words, "He's going to save the people who are kind of in that, you know, category of philanthropists, and, you know, the non-murderers, and the people who give, you know, 10% of their income away, or whatever it is". I think that's where we see it more today in our current society, than necessarily what we saw in Paul's time - being, "Hey, you know we are this people group, and they're that people group", but I think it's our sin rate that really puts us into those categories. But knowing that God does offer Salvation to everybody - which is incredible - how does that impact how you, and when you, reach out to people today?

C: Well, that's one of the first things I'll talk to them about, is that anyone can make the choice to follow Christ. It doesn't matter how dirty you are - He's going to clean you up. And I think a lot of people are under the thought that they have to clean up their life first, before they can come to Jesus. I've actually heard that when I've witnessed to people. You know, we live in a time - and this is even outside of politics - everything is just so polarizing one way or the other. So, you know, there's believers and non-believers. I think even as Christians, sometimes we feel like we're at war with non-believers, when that's not how we should be looking at them at all. They're lost souls that have the choice to follow Jesus.

A: These are tough times. You not only have believers versus non-believers, you have believers versus believers - and just all this crazy, crazy stuff. And what it does is, it detracts us completely away from focusing on Jesus. I mean, let's be very clear about that.

N: Yeah. I think in today's world, it's real easy to do an us-versus-them. We've got to remember Christ died for everyone. He died for the Democrat and the Republican, for the agnostic and the atheist, for the Buddhist and the Hindu - everybody. And when we remember that, it takes us back to a place of humility, and a place where we are hungry to go out and share the Good News, because that same Good News is what saved us. And that same offer of Salvation is for them as well.