

THE PROMISE OF FAITH MEANS

WE ARE ALL ONE IN CHRIST



Galatians 3:26-29

This Study Paper contains the following

-  Introduction to the passage
-  What these verses mean
-  Summary
-  A suggestion of what to preach about from these verses
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Introduction to the passage

Paul has been saying that God, from the time of Abraham, always said that the only hope for people to be saved from sin was by believing in God's promise of salvation through Christ. To convince us that we are not perfect enough to earn our own salvation, God made a temporary arrangement for everyone to keep certain laws: the Gentiles – the laws in their consciences; the Jews – the law of Moses. Everyone has failed to live by their laws perfectly. This experience proves how necessary it was for Christ to come to obtain salvation for us and to present it to us as a gift. Now that Christ has done so for all who believe, there is no need for us to rely on keeping any laws for our salvation (verse 25) as some people were wrongly teaching the Galatian believers to do. In this new age believers rely on Christ. The law is set aside and there is now no distinction between Jew and Gentile. These closing verses of chapter 3 of this study are the practical application of the theological argument that has taken place from verses 7 to 25.

What these verses mean

Verse 26

You are all

Formerly there was a difference between Jews and Gentiles because only Jews had a special revelation of God's will through the Hebrew Old Testament. But from Christ's coming, both Jews and Gentiles have

exactly the same privilege of learning of God's final revelation of himself in Christ. God does not favour any one nation in this gospel age. All nations have equal right to gospel truth.

sons of God

In verse 7 of this chapter Paul said that all believers are "sons of Abraham" – i.e. have the same believing nature as Abraham had. Now Paul gives believers an even higher name – "sons of God". Because Christ is God's **actual** Son, all who are united to Christ become God's **adopted** sons and daughters.¹ The Greek word means "fully mature sons", not just "children" needing a guardian (verse 25).

through faith in Christ Jesus,

Faith, not the keeping of laws, is the instrument by which we experience being "in Christ". It is not our believing in Christ that justifies us before God, otherwise "our faith" becomes "works", which would be no different from trying to observe the law. Rather, it is God the Father who presents Christ to us, through the Holy Spirit, in such a way that we respond by believing in Jesus dying for us on the cross.² It is God's choosing to reveal these things to us that is the act by which God puts us "in Christ" (Eph. 1:4).³ Faith is the act by which we draw benefit from being "in Christ" (Ephesians 2:8). Paul is saying that because they have put their faith in Christ, they have a position, a standing in Christ. Paul uses the phrase "in Christ" some 60 times in the New Testament. God is the heavenly Father only of those who are "in Christ".

Verse 27

for all of you who were baptised into Christ

Our sonship is because we are united to Christ through faith. The Christian believer, through the outward act of baptism, demonstrates this inner experience. It is not the baptism that is the basis of **unity** with Christ, as baptism is the declaration to other people of the inner experience that has taken place. Baptism is a visual identification with Christ

¹ Being looked upon by God as an adopted son (or daughter) brings immediate privileges

1. A permanent, loving relationship with God (John 10:27-29)
2. A sharing of the characteristics of God by his indwelling Spirit (2 Pet. 1:1-4)
3. The right of immediate access to God (Rom. 5:1-2)
4. The expectation of blessing from God (Luke 11:11-13; Rom. 8:32)
5. Confidence in the Father's provision (Matt. 6:31-34)
6. As heirs of God, a promise of even greater things to come (1 John 3:2; Rom. 8:16-17).

Source: *Free in Christ* (Edgar H. Andrews), Evangelical Press.

² This is known as the doctrine of regeneration. See Focus Point on page 134.

³ This is known as the doctrine of election.

that we are buried beneath the water and rise again as Christ was buried and rose.⁴ Compare Romans 6:3-4. We see therefore that baptism was the normal practice for believers from the earliest time.⁵ Paul could be making reference to their own baptism at this point to remind the Galatians of the basis upon which they had made their outward profession of faith and to see how they were being led astray.

NB. Paul cannot possibly mean that the act of baptism actually unites a person with Christ, for the following reasons:

1. We know, from other scriptures, that God's election unites believers to Christ.
2. Throughout this letter Paul insists that salvation is not because of anything we do, but is by faith alone.
3. Some true believers are not baptised. If baptism were the act that unites to Christ, what is their position? Compare Luke 23:42, 43.

have clothed yourselves with Christ.

Paul uses a picture of putting on clothes to describe the effect upon the believer that faith in Christ brings. We are not talking about someone who like an actor may put on a mask and pretend to be someone else. Believers have "clothed themselves" in the characteristics of the life of Christ. Compare Romans 13:14; 1 Peter 5:5. An example that has been used is the policeman who gets up in the morning and goes to work. He is like any other person until he puts on his uniform. Then he becomes a changed man; he now has an authority that has been given to him. He represents the rule of law and is respected by others for that. If we take Paul's illustration of putting on clothes and our example of the policeman's uniform, then the person who has faith in Christ has shown to others through being baptised that he is a changed person, different from what he was before. He is now wearing the clothes of Christ, his characteristics. We must remember that this is a picture to help us understand spiritual truth. There are no special clothes that Christian believers physically wear.

Verse 28

There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female,

As a Pharisee, Paul would often have given thanks that he was a Jew and

⁴ Grace Publications has published a book, "Baptism – Sign and Seal of the Covenant of Grace". A copy can be obtained by writing to Grace Baptist Mission at the address given at the front of this book for further reading on this subject.

⁵ In New Testament days it seems that baptism was the way believers expressed their repentance and faith as there was no long gap between conversion and baptism. Conversion, baptism and church membership were all part of the same experience of salvation.

not a Gentile; free and not a slave; a man and not a woman. Now, as a Christian, Paul declares these differences, while still real differences, must not have any significance in the church fellowship. They do not matter. A slave is as much a child of God as a master; a woman as much as a man.

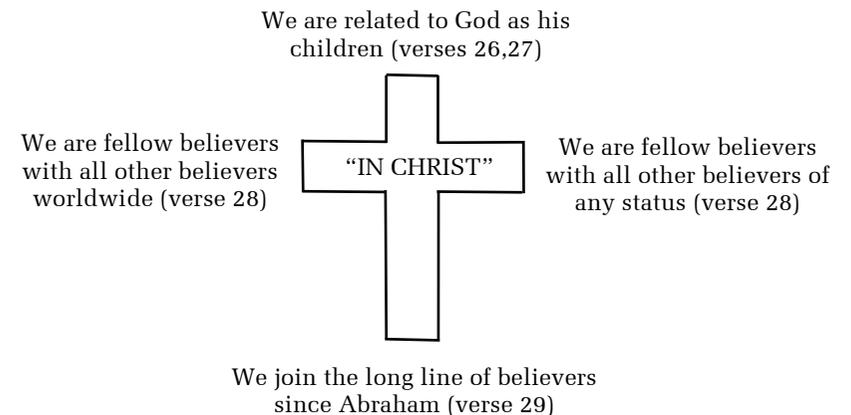
for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

All are equal in their need of salvation; all are equally unable to procure it for themselves; all are equally dependent on Christ; all equally share what Christ has procured. We can return to the illustration from the previous verse to remind ourselves that all true Christian believers have put on Christ. They are clothed the same way (in their spiritual state), removing the distinction between race, gender and wealth.

Verse 29

If you belong to Christ,

Any organisation that has a membership will list all the benefits and privileges that its members can enjoy. Paul sets out for the Galatians all the benefits that those who have put their trust in Christ and are totally dependent upon him have. These benefits are not related to how well a person obeys laws or follows religious rites. It is simply based upon the person belonging to Christ through faith.



"So conversion, although supernatural in its origin, is natural in its effect. It does not disrupt nature, but fulfils it, for it puts me where I belong. It relates me to God, to man and to history. It enables me to answer the most basic of all human questions, 'Who am I?' and to say, 'In Christ I am a son of God. In Christ I am united to all the redeemed people of God, past, present and future. In Christ I discover my identity. In Christ I come home.'" John R.W.Stott

then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Christ was the descendant of Abraham, the seed that was promised to him (verse 16). If believers are "in Christ" they also become Abraham's seed. So what was promised to Abraham (Heb. 11:10,16) is theirs also! This promise comes to each Christian believer as an inheritance. We normally understand "inheritance" in the physical realm as gaining possession of land and wealth because we belong to a family and the ownership passes down to us as heirs, the next in line. If we have trusted in Christ for salvation then we are now part of God's family, we are his children (John 1:12-13). Abraham was promised land, descendants and the blessing of all nations. In that physical sense, the Jewish nation had the benefits, but the promise given to Abraham was primarily a spiritual one. This was fulfilled in Christ and the coming of the Spirit. The promised Spirit came at Pentecost and continues to be given to all those who belong to Christ and are therefore of Abraham's seed.

N.B. This truth – that Christian believers are Abraham's seed – means that we can understand a number of Old Testament prophecies about Israel as being fulfilled in the Christian church in the gospel age. For example Acts 15:15-17 is an Old Testament prophecy about the tabernacle of David. James says it is fulfilled by Gentiles becoming believers (verse 14). The "tabernacle of David" now means "the church".



Summary

These four verses act as a bridge between the first part of Paul's letter and the second part contained in chapters 4, 5 and 6. Paul has had to tackle the problem of the Galatians following false teachers, who insisted that an outward, physical observance of religious ritual was necessary. Paul had shown the Galatians how the promise to Abraham worked and differed from the law given to Moses. Following the law placed an emphasis on man's keeping the law, which turned out to be an impossibility. The promise to Abraham was God acting sovereignly, acting in accordance with his will and choosing. By sending his Son Jesus Christ as the essence of this promise, God shows such favour to fallen man, demonstrating what a gracious, loving and kind God he is. There are benefits for all those who believe in this provision of Christ and Paul introduces them to us in these closing verses of chapter 3. These are sonship (v26), union with Christ (v27) and the unity of God's people and their inheritance (v 28-29). These themes are developed further in the second half of the letter to the Galatians.



A suggestion of what to preach about from these verses

You are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:28)

Disunity is one of the commonest things on earth! Nation against nation; tribe against tribe; caste against caste; class against class; family against family; relative against relative. Yet Paul says that all true believers are **one!**

He does not mean that believers become indistinguishable from each other. Differences of culture, language, nationality always remain, though they are not to be barriers to fellowship.

He does not mean that all denominational differences must be abolished. He says that believers **are** one already. This unity already exists. Unity is not the same as uniformity.

The Greek word "one" is the masculine singular form – "one person". It does not mean "one organisation". See Romans 12:5; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 4:13. Believers are all members of the one body of Christ.

1. **This unity prophesied.** (See Isaiah 11:13.)

Isaiah 11 describes the coming Messiah (Jesus Christ) and the peaceable nature of his kingdom. Sinners, compared to wild animals, will be converted through gospel preaching and become peaceable and united. Gentiles will be at peace with Jews; Ephraim (meaning "Israel") will be at peace with Judah. All believers will be at one under the lordship of Christ, is what Isaiah says. Compare Romans 15:12.

2. **This unity prayed for.** (See John 10:16; 17:20-21.)

Jesus made it clear that Jews ("this fold") and Gentiles ("other sheep") would join together when they heard his voice (through gospel preaching and the Scriptures) in "one flock" – i.e. all believers are the one family of God. Jesus prayed that all believers should enjoy the same sort of unity among themselves as he enjoyed with his Father. It is a unity of believers sharing a common spiritual life, not a unity of churches.

3. **This unity produced.** (See Acts 4:32.)

The previous verse (Acts 4:31) makes it clear that this spirit of unity and harmony came about because believers were filled with the Holy Spirit. This unity is elsewhere described as "of the Spirit"

(Eph. 4:3, 13; Col. 2:2; 1 Co. 1:10). All these spiritual graces are the result of the Holy Spirit's dwelling in the believer. They are not produced any other way.

4. **This unity to be preserved.** (See Ephesians 4:3.) Believers do not create this unity, the Holy Spirit does. But believers must at all times work hard to preserve it. This means practising lowliness, meekness, longsuffering, endurance, love (Eph. 4:2). If each believer cultivates these virtues, harmony and unity with other believers will be a fact. But such a life is only possible by making a continual effort. This peaceful kind of life will be noticed by unbelievers. They will know that such a lifestyle is not normal human life. So they will be made to acknowledge that the life of Jesus Christ in such believers is a reality (John 17:23).

Believers therefore are called to refuse to allow hatred, anger, pride, resentment, jealousy, wrong motives to govern their relationships with other people and especially other believers (Matt. 5:9). No one part of our physical bodies dislikes any other part. Likewise, if there is no sympathy between believers, it must be doubtful if they are members of the same body!

 **Focus Point:**
Regeneration

The human condition and the need of a spiritual birth

When man was first created everything was good and perfect. Then Adam and Eve disobeyed God and everything was ruined as sin entered the world. In forbidding them to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, God told Adam and Eve that they would die if they disobeyed. Physically they continued to live, Adam until he was 930 years of age. Spiritually though, they died at the moment of their disobedience. In Ephesians 2:1 the human condition is described as being dead in sin. This is the direct result of the first human beings not obeying God's commands.

In the same way that a dead person cannot do anything to change his physical condition, so it is the same with the spiritual condition. Every living person without exception begins his or her life in a spiritually helpless and hopeless position. It is impossible for a person to do anything about their spiritual condition. Jesus said that we need to be

born again. Jesus was not talking about physical birth but a spiritual one. Yet there is a parallel between the two types of birth in that we have no control over the events. We contribute nothing to our physical birth, it being initiated by our parents. It is the same with the spiritual birth; it is initiated by God our heavenly Father. Without a physical birth we could have no existence; so too without a spiritual birth we can have no spiritual life. Men and women are born in sin with a nature already alien to God. We are spiritually dead and need a spiritual new birth.

Spiritual birth results in change

The spiritual birth involves a change taking place within a person. Beforehand, the person's desires are not to God but to themselves and the things of this world. The spiritual birth changes all this, resulting in the person now wanting to follow the ways that God has set out in his Word. This is not done out of duty but because of a new-found love for God, which arises out of an appreciation of the fact that Jesus died for them.

Regeneration; a part of salvation

Spiritual birth or being born again is the meaning of the word **regeneration**. The Bible uses other words to teach us that there are various aspects of salvation. For example, we have words such as repentance and faith, justification, redemption, washing, cleansing, sealing etc. Each word gives a different emphasis to the effects of spiritual birth, which helps us to understand all that is taking place. We must not try and break down salvation into different steps and expect to see these as distinct phases that a person must display when coming to faith. These words are there to help us understand what takes place when a person is saved.

Regeneration is essential to salvation

We have said that a person who is spiritually dead cannot do anything about his or her situation. So how does such a person experience new birth? The answer is that the Holy Spirit begins this work. He does this by bringing sinners to hear the gospel, which is the good news of Jesus Christ dying for sinners. As people hear the message, the Holy Spirit shows the hearer his true condition. This beginning part of salvation, when a spiritually dead person is brought into a situation where he hears the gospel and is capable of responding to it, is the **regenerating** work of the Holy Spirit.

Source used: Bitesize Theology by Peter Jeffrey (Evangelical Press)



Over to you

There are many today who think that Christian unity is about joining churches together into large institutions and having conferences and meetings. Do you think that this is what Paul means when he says, “For you are all one in Christ”? What do you think Christian unity means?

Are there racial, tribal, ethnic, social conflicts in your area? Do they appear in your congregation? If they do, how would you tackle the problem now that you have studied the first half of the Galatian letter?