

This Page:

Is Jesus the Only Savior?

┆ Christian Inclusivism

Mind Games Survival Course Manual



Table of Contents

Is Jesus the Only Savior?

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II. Christian Inclusivism

Most Christians reject Religious Pluralism. But many are still uncomfortable with the claims of exclusivism. They opt for what is known as Christian Inclusivism.

A. *What is Christian Inclusivism?*

Christian Inclusivism is the view that, although Jesus is the exclusive Savior, many are included in His salvation who have never explicitly trusted in Him, nor perhaps even heard of Him. Inclusivists believe that God accepts an "implicit" faith in lieu of explicit faith in Christ. This may be in the form of a response to God's general revelation through creation or conscience, or through truth in other religions . . . or through some other means. Most inclusivists believe that their view is supported by Scripture.

2. *Weaknesses of Christian Inclusivism*

1. The biblical examples of "implicit believers" are not convincing.

Many inclusivists site the following examples of what they believe are "implicit believers" referred to in Scripture.

- a. Melchizedek (Gen. 14:18ff) and Jethro (Exod. 2--3) are referred to as priests of the true God, outside of Israel. But it must be pointed out that these men lived and served as priests before the founding of the nation Israel, and that they are described as believing in the same God as Abraham and Moses (cf. Gen. 14:19,22). They are undoubtedly examples of priests of the true God, whom they knew through the revelation granted to the descendants of Adam (and later of Noah). They represent the true worship that was corrupted and replaced by pagan beliefs, described in Romans 1:20ff. The demise of this

true worship throughout the world occasioned the formation of Israel as a "nation of priests" (Exod. 19:5--6).

2. Naaman the Syrian is cited as an example of an "implicit" believer outside of Israel (2 Kings 5). But it is clear that he came to an explicit faith in the God of Israel (cf. 2 Kings 5:15,17). He asked forgiveness of the Lord for his continued participation in the rituals at the temple to the god Rimmon (v.18), no doubt conducted because his military position required it.
 3. The repentant Ninevites are often cited as believers outside Israel (the book of Jonah). But it is clear that they came to an explicit faith in the God whom Jonah preached (Jonah 3:5), just as Naaman had.
 4. The Magi who came to worship the newborn Jesus are sometimes referred to as "implicit" believers. But it is clear that though their prior beliefs were no doubt pagan in nature, they were seeking the true God, and were directed by Him to His Messiah, Jesus. They had most likely known of the God of Israel through the prophecies of Daniel (who had served in Babylon), and perhaps the oracles of Balaam (Num. 24:17).
 5. Cornelius the Centurion is perhaps cited more than any biblical figure as an example of one who had come to "faith" before hearing of Christ. It is true that he is referred to as a "pious" man before hearing the gospel (Acts 10:2). But, although he was in touch with the true God, he did not receive salvation until he heard the message about Christ through Peter. The angel who prepared Cornelius for Peter's visit told him that he would bring him the message through which he would be saved (Acts 11:13--14). This is exactly what occurred (Acts 10:43--44).
2. The biblical texts that are appealed to are unconvincing.
 - a. Malachi 1:11 is often mentioned as a reference to Gentiles who worship the true God, yet in ignorance. Yet, it is clear that this verse refers to the future kingdom of the Lord as a time when He will be worshipped among all the nations. This was not true during Malachi's lifetime.
 2. Peter's statement in Acts 10:34--35 is often quoted: "God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him." But this verse does not state that anyone who does these things is saved. It says that such a person is welcome (or "accepted") by God, when he comes to Him through faith in Christ. Peter did not believe that Gentiles could come to faith. God convinced

him that nationality is no barrier to becoming a believer in Jesus!

3. In Acts 14:16--17, Paul states that though in times past God let the nations go their own way, He never left Himself "without witness, in that He did good and gave . . . rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying . . . hearts with food and gladness." This passage does not say, however, that the witness to God's existence and goodness through the natural order is sufficient to save. It says that this witness is sufficient to turn a person toward seeking the true God. Paul and Barnabas had come to tell their listeners how they might now do this!
 4. In Acts 17:23, Paul says that he had come to Athens to tell the Athenians about the God whom they worshipped "in ignorance" by constructing an altar "to the unknown God." He did not say, however, that this "ignorant worship" was sufficient to save them. He later called on them to "repent" and turn to the true God through faith in Jesus (vv. 30--31).
 5. Romans 1:18--23 speaks of the evidence for God in His creation. Romans 2:14--16 also refers to the voice of God in our conscience. In no place, however, is it stated that response to these two avenues of revelation is sufficient to save. What we can know through the creation and through our conscience is that there is a God, and that our moral failings have alienated us from Him. Something more must be made known to us, if we are to be reconciled with Him.
3. The behavior of the early Christians does not seem to be consistent with their having held a belief that could be characterized as Christian Inclusivism.

If the apostle Paul, for instance, believed as the inclusivists do, it seems improbable that he would make a statement such as this:

But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, in order that I may finish my course, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God. And now, behold, I know that you all, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will see my face no more. Therefore I testify to you this day, that **I am innocent of the blood of all men** (Acts 20:24--26).

4. Finally, many biblical texts give strong support to the belief that explicit faith in Christ is essential for salvation:

Everyone who believes in Him [Jesus] receives

forgiveness of sins (Acts 10:43).

God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent (Acts 17:30).

For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all (1 Tim. 2:5--6).

He who has the son has the life; he who does not have the son of God does not have the life (1 John 5:12).

So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of [or about] Christ (Rom. 10:17).

5. We must conclude, then, that the voice of Scripture affirms that for one to come to salvation, he must hear and place his faith in the message about that salvation which God reveals to him. In no instance do we find an expression of "implicit" faith being accepted in lieu of explicit faith in God and His word. In this age, that message centers on the person and work of Jesus Christ. This is the gospel through which God bring us salvation (Cf. 1 Cor. 15:1--4).

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[Table of Contents](#)



[Return to Probe Home](#)