



Christianity — Exclusive or Inclusive?

By

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Jesus told His disciples –

“Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know. Thomas said to Him, ‘Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.’” John 14:1-6

That sounds **exclusive**.

The Apostle Paul wrote Christians –

“In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory.”
Ephesians 1:11-14 (NIV)

That sounds **inclusive**.

So is Christianity **exclusive** or **inclusive**?

Christianity Exclusive

Exclusive

Jesus said He is the only way to God and that's true. Truth is the point. Truth is exclusive. Truth excludes anything that is not true. The word exclusive means "excluding or not admitting other things" (Oxford Dictionary). Here's an example:

A house is fully involved. Fire, heat and smoke are so widespread that firefighters cannot gain access from the front or sides of the house and fire fighters are struggling to gain access to the back of the house. Two people are inside the house looking for a way to escape. One of them sees there is just one window that is still accessible. It's in a back room, but the path to it is quickly narrowing because of flames and smoke. The person who sees the window points to it and tells the other person that it is the only way to safety; that if they don't go to that window and get out quickly they both will die in the fire.

You could say that the person pointing to the only viable escape route is being "exclusive" ("excluding or not admitting other things"), but in that case what they are saying is true. There is no other way out. The person who is pointing to the back window is excluding other windows and doors in the house; not because there are no other windows or doors in the house but because trying to use those other windows and doors will lead them to a fiery death. Only one window in the house will lead them to life. Though it might sound "exclusive" to make the 'one-window-escape' claim, it's true .. because it's true.

I often hear from non-Christians that there are many ways to God. It's like the burning house – there are many doors and windows in the house – but will walking through fire to get to them lead to life or death? There are many religions and philosophies available for people to follow, but where do they lead? Do they lead to life or death?

What's the old saying? "Tis impossible to be sure of any thing but Death and Taxes." Death is definitely a certainty in this life, which is exactly why we can believe Jesus when He said "No one comes to the Father except through Me." Jesus died, then rose from the dead. People don't do that. People don't die and rise from the dead. People die and remain dead. But Jesus died and rose from the dead. He told people He would die, rise from the dead and ascend back to Heaven, and He did just that. That fact makes Jesus unique in the human race. Jesus is the only Person to come from Heaven, be born of a virgin, live a perfect life, die for the sins of the world, rise from the dead and ascend back to Heaven. That's why we can believe that no one comes to the Father except through Jesus Christ. It sounds exclusive because it is exclusive. There is no other way to God. Just like the one window in the burning house that led to life, Jesus is the one way to eternal life.

Christianity Inclusive

Inclusive

The word inclusive means “including everything or all types of people” (Cambridge Dictionary). Many Christians are hesitant to use the term “inclusive” because of the false teaching known as “inclusive Christianity.” That’s a type of unity movement that claims Jesus died to save everyone and that everyone will be saved whether they repent of their sins and confess Jesus as Lord and Savior during their lifetime or not. It’s also known as “interfaith Christianity,” “pluralistic Christianity,” “universal Christianity” (universalism, universal reconciliation), and “progressive Christianity.” This is not the kind of “inclusion” any biblical writer believed or taught. “Inclusive Christianity” (aka – universal reconciliation) is a false gospel.

The “exclusivity” of Christ’s claim to be the only way to God is true and any competing claims about how to come to God are not true. Jesus’ claim “that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life,” and, “he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God,” is true. (John 3:15-18) To believe otherwise is not true.

So then, why even use the term “inclusive” when speaking about Christianity?

Paul wrote in Ephesians that “you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation.” (NIV) Being “included” in Christ is the result of believing the exclusive truth that Jesus is the ONLY way to God.

Other translations read –

“In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise ...” NKJV

“In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise ...” NASB

“In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit ...” ESV

“In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise ...” KJV

“When you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and when you believed in Him, you were also sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.” HCSB

The Greek reads – εν ω και υμεις ακουσαντες τον λογον της αληθειας το ευαγγελιον της σωτηριας υμων εν ω και πιστευσαντες εσφραγισθητε τω πνευματι της επαγγελιας τω αγιω.

The words “included” and “trusted” are not in the Greek text because of an “interrupted construction” in the Greek language (Dr. Kenneth Wuest, *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament*). The Greek reads – “in whom also as for you, having heard the word of the truth, the good news of your salvation, in whom having believed, you were sealed with the Spirit of the promise, the Holy.”

When a person accepts the “exclusive” claims of Jesus Christ as true and “believes in Him,” they are “sealed” (*sphragizo* – first aorist passive indicative – “to set a seal upon, mark with a seal”) with the “Spirit of the promise.” This spiritual sealing at salvation is the process of marking and including a person as belonging to God. In ancient times seals were used as both a “guarantee indicating not only ownership but also to guarantee the correctness of the contents” (Fritz Rienecker, Cleon Rogers, *Linguistic Key To The Greek New Testament*).

God places the Holy Spirit into every person who hears “the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation” and believes in the exclusive truth about Jesus Christ –

“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself ...” Ephesians 1:7-9

There is no other person or philosophy or belief system or worldview in which “we have redemption.” There is no other way to receive “the forgiveness of sins.” Redemption is through “His blood,” the Blood of Jesus Christ. Forgiveness of sins is through Jesus Christ alone! As the Apostle Peter made so clear as he gave his apologetic before the Sanhedrin –

“... let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. This is the ‘stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.’ Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” Acts 4:10-12

God’s action is both “exclusive” and “inclusive” at the same time. All who believe the exclusive Gospel of Christ are included in (added to) the Body of Christ – “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.” (Romans 1:16) As Luke wrote in the Book of Acts – “the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.” (Acts 2:47) The “inclusive” result of a person being added to the Church follows their belief

in the “exclusive” message of the Gospel. Those who do not believe the exclusive message of the Gospel are not included in the Body of Christ. As Jesus told Nicodemus – “... he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” (John 3:18)

As Paul wrote –

“And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.” Ephesians 2:1-3

Remember the two people in the burning house? They were presented with the “exclusive” truth that there was only one way to escape a fiery death by following the path to the one and only available window to freedom. If they chose to accept that exclusive truth and follow that path and climb through that window, they would be “included” into a continued life because they chose to believe the exclusive truth. They were “saved” by believing and acting upon that truth.

The same is true with the Gospel of Christ. The Gospel contains both an “exclusive” message (Jesus is the only way to God) and an “inclusive” result (salvation and eternal life).

Jesus stated it beautifully and succinctly: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16) There is no other “way” to God and that is the truth. There are other “ways” that purport to be viable methods of knowing God, but they do not lead to truth – they lead to destruction. Jesus said –

“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.” Matthew 7:13-14

God is a loving God. He is rich in mercy and loves us with a great love, even when we are his enemies.

“Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.” Romans 5:9-11

If you are reading this and are still wondering which “way” to go in life, we pray you will consider the truth claims of Jesus Christ. He is unique in all of human history and presents Himself to you as the “only way” of escape and life everlasting. Everyone who believes the exclusive message of the Gospel is rescued (saved) and included in receiving the gift of eternal life.

“But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” Ephesians 2:4-9

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