

“CHRISTIANITY’S INCLUSIVITY AND EXCLUSIVITY”

I. Introduction

- A. It is not uncommon to hear people say that Christianity is narrow-minded and intolerant.
 - 1. I was recently speaking with one individual who complained that churches like ours have an attitude that she described as, “anti-everyone who is not like them.”
 - 2. Now, there certainly can be times when we Christians do or say things that give people an unnecessarily bad impression about Christianity.
 - 3. This is regrettable, because the fundamental message of Christianity is one of good news.
 - 4. After all, that is what the word ‘gospel’ means.
 - 5. Nevertheless, it seems that it is more often the case that people in our culture take offense at Christianity not because of the way in which its message is presented, but because they find the message itself to be offensive.
- B. One way to respond when people charge Christianity with being narrow is to point out that there is an important sense in which it is inclusive.
 - 1. Its offer of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ is extended to people of every nation, race, tribe, and tongue.
 - 2. At the same time, there has to be some kind of exclusivity if our inclusivity is going to be meaningful in any significant sense.
 - 3. You can’t really include people in something unless there are some parameters that define what it is that they are being included in.

4. This text from 1 Timothy helps us to understand the nature of Christianity's inclusivity and the nature of its exclusivity.

II. Prayer for All Types of People

- A. Our passage begins with Paul exhorting Timothy and the church in Ephesus to offer prayers for all people.
 1. We should note a couple of things about this in connection with the preceding context.
 2. First, notice the term "then" in verse 1 of our passage.
 3. This term, which would be better translated as "therefore" in this context, tells us that Paul is drawing an inference drawn based upon the things that he has just said.
 4. As we saw in last week's sermon, chapter 1 ended with Paul referring to two men who were excommunicated for teaching false doctrine that consisted of speculative teachings based on Old Testament genealogies.
 5. Paul's exhortation here to pray for all people indicates that those false teachers were being too exclusive.
 6. They were telling people that they should focus their attention on Jewish myths and genealogies rather than seek the salvation of Gentiles.
 7. Paul is correcting that teaching by emphasizing the importance of praying for all sorts of people.
- B. The other thing to note about verse 1 in light of the preceding context has to do with the phrase "First of all."
 1. After beginning this letter by focusing on the need to guard against false teaching, Paul now zeros in on prayer as a matter of first priority.

2. This calls our attention to the vital importance of prayer in the Christian life.
 3. This is something that is emphasized throughout Paul's letters, which typically begin with him telling the recipients about his prayers for them.
 4. Paul's teaching about prayer here in 1 Timothy 2 also reminds us that God not only wants us to bring our personal needs and concerns to him in prayer, though he certainly does want us to do that.
 5. It also makes it clear that God wants us to pray for the people of the world and for the advance of the gospel in it.
- C. Paul especially stresses the importance of praying for the civil authorities.
1. He says that we are to pray for kings and those who are in high positions.
 2. This is especially noteworthy given that Nero was the emperor of Rome at that time.
 3. Nero was a wicked, immoral, and unstable man, as well as a notorious persecutor of Christians.
 4. Yet Paul tells the Christians in Ephesus to pray for Nero.
 5. And notice what he says about the content of our prayers for those in positions of authority.
 6. We should pray for civil rulers so "that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way."
 7. God works through civil governments to maintain order in the world for the sake of his people.
 8. While the Lord can and does build his church under all sorts of social conditions, stable leadership in the civil sphere often has a

beneficial effect on the establishment of the church and the advance of the gospel.

- D. We see one example this in ancient Rome, even though Rome was a great persecutor of the early Christians.
1. Rome's conviction of its exceptionalism led it to think that it had a responsibility of sharing its enlightened civilization with the rest of the world.
 2. The establishment of the *pax Romana* (the Roman peace) brought to an end a long period of warfare in the Mediterranean region.
 3. Travel and commerce were made much easier through Rome's improved roads and its crackdown on piracy.
 4. The widespread use of the Greek and Latin languages made communication much easier.
 5. Rome had no intention of creating conditions that were favorable for the spread of the Christian religion, but God sovereignly worked through Rome to do precisely that.
 6. The Lord continues to do the same thing today.
 7. Of course, the New Testament does not give us any grounds to expect the civil authorities to promote the cause of the kingdom of God.
 8. What we should expect of the state is that it will uphold justice and good order, and we should pray to that end.
 9. Our situation as believers in this present evil age is analogous to the situation of the Israelites when they were living in exile in Babylon.
 10. This is why the New Testament refers to Christians as exiles and sojourners.

11. The words that the Lord spoke to the exiled people of Israel through Jeremiah back in the sixth century apply to us today: “seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.” (Jer 29:7 ESV)

III. Salvation for All Types of People

- A. Our text continues with Paul telling Timothy that God is pleased with the prayers that his people offer for civil rulers because he “desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”
 1. This is a verse that could easily be misunderstood, and it has been misunderstood by many people.
 2. It is important for us to remember that we cannot interpret this verse in a manner that is in conflict with what is said elsewhere in the Bible.
 3. In speaking of something that God desires, Paul is obviously talking about God’s will.
 4. He cannot be saying that God wills the salvation of all people in the sense that he has decreed the salvation of all people.
 5. If that were the case, then everyone would be saved, since no one can resist God’s will.
 6. As he says in Isaiah 46, “I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,’ calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country. I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it.” (Is 46:9–11 ESV)
 7. We know that God has not purposed the salvation of all people because the Bible explicitly tells us that he has willed to save some and to leave the rest in their sin. (see Rom. 9:18-24)

- B. What, then, does Paul mean when he says that God desires all people to be saved?
1. Once again, it is helpful to look at the surrounding context to gain insight into what Paul is getting at.
 2. As we noted earlier, chapter 1 focused in large part on how the Ephesian church was being troubled by false teachers who were misusing the law by promoting speculative teachings based on Old Testament genealogies.
 3. Here in our text, Paul twice uses the phrase “all people” (which is literally “all men” in the Greek), and he calls attention to the fact that he was appointed as “a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.”
 4. When we put these things together, it becomes clear that Paul is responding to false teaching that downplayed the importance of proclaiming the gospel to the Gentiles.
 5. This tells us that the phrase “all people” does not refer to every single individual in the world, but to every type of person in the world.
- C. This is consistent with how the term “all” is used elsewhere in Paul’s writings.
1. For example, in Romans 11:32, where he is discussing the outworking of God’s redemptive purposes among Jews and Gentiles, he writes, “For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all.”
 2. This cannot mean that all people will eventually be saved, because just two chapters earlier in Romans Paul said that God “has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.” (9:18)
 3. In Romans 11:28 Paul is saying that at different eras in history, both Gentiles and Jews were cut off from the covenant people.

4. In the Old Testament period, all of the Gentiles were consigned to disobedience, with the exception of the few who were ingrafted into Israel.
 5. And in the church era, all Israel is consigned to disobedience, with the exception of the small but steady flow of individual Jews who are being saved throughout the church age.
 6. By working things out in this way, God is bringing about the salvation of all of those whom he has appointed to eternal life among both the Jews and the Gentiles.
 7. In our text in 1 Timothy, Paul is using the term “all” in the same basic sense.
 8. The false teachers in Ephesus were probably saying that the gospel is only for those who follow their speculative teachings, teachings that were bound up with Jewish ethnicity and Jewish ceremonies.
 9. Paul is saying that the gospel is for everyone.
- D. This relates to something that is sometimes referred to as the free and well-meant offer of the gospel.
1. It is true that Scripture tells us that the only people who will come to Jesus in faith are those whom God chose in Christ before the foundation of the world.
 2. At the same time, Scripture also tells us that the offer of salvation through faith in Christ is to be extended to everyone.
 3. Of course, we do need to be careful about how we phrase that offer.
 4. Christians have sometimes gone too far when they are communicating the gospel.
 5. One such example is the first of the so-called “Four Spiritual Laws,” the popular evangelistic tract used by Campus Crusade for Christ.

6. Though the intentions of those who use that tract are good, we do not have biblical grounds for saying to everyone we meet, "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life."
 7. We don't know that that is the case.
 8. What we can say is that Jesus invites everyone who is burdened by the guilt of their sin to come to him and be freed from that burden, and that he promises that he will never turn away anyone who comes to him in faith.
- E. One last thing to note about verse 5 has to do with what it tells us about the means by which people are saved.
1. Paul describes salvation as a matter of coming to the knowledge of the truth.
 2. This is in conflict with the Roman Catholic teaching that says that, while Christ is indeed the only Savior, explicit faith in Christ is not necessary for salvation.
 3. Since the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s, Rome's official position has been that salvation is available to anyone who earnestly strives to live according to the light that they have been given.
 4. Listen to how this teaching was once explained by Avery Dulles, the late cardinal of New York: "Who, then, can be saved? Catholics can be saved if they believe the Word of God as taught by the Church and if they obey the commandments. Other Christians can be saved if they submit their lives to Christ and join the community where they think he wills to be found. Jews can be saved if they look forward in hope to the Messiah and try to ascertain whether God's promise has been fulfilled. Adherents of other religions can be saved if, with the help of grace, they sincerely seek God and strive to do his will. Even atheists can be saved if they worship God under some other name and place their lives at the service of truth and justice. God's saving grace, channeled through Christ the

one Mediator, leaves no one unassisted.”

5. This teaching in direct conflict with the clear teaching of Scripture.
6. For example, Romans 10:13-14 says, “For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?”
7. Rome’s embrace of inclusive salvation without explicit faith in Christ is a concession to modernism and is in direct conflict with its own earlier teachings.

IV. The One Mediator for All Types of People

- A. We turn now to the last part of our passage, where Paul declares that Jesus is the one mediator between God and men.
 1. The reason why we need a mediator is because our sin has resulted in our being estranged from God and falling under his just wrath.
 2. This is why we cannot agree with those who say that all of the different religions of the world are paths that lead to God.
 3. None of the other religions in the world provide a solution to the human dilemma caused by sin.
 4. Only the Lord Jesus, by his perfect obedience and sacrifice, has fully satisfied the justice of God and secured salvation for all whom the Father has given to him.
- B. Jesus alone can serve as our mediator because he alone is both fully God and fully man.
 1. We need a divine mediator because only God could accomplish what had to be accomplished in order to secure our salvation.

2. We need a human mediator because only a man could stand in our place as our substitute.
 3. The reason why Paul places the emphasis upon the humanity of Jesus here is because of his repeated use of the term “man” in these verses.
 4. This is less evident in the ESV because it translates the term “man” in verses 1 and 4 as “people,” as it explains in a footnote.
 5. The point that Paul is stressing here is that because Jesus truly became one with us in our humanity, he is qualified to be man’s mediator with God.
- C. Paul further defines the nature of Christ’s mediatorial work in verse 6, where he says that Christ “gave himself as a ransom for all.”
1. Again, the term “all” needs to be understood in light of the immediate context and the teaching of the rest of Scripture.
 2. We cannot say that Jesus died as a ransom for every single person in the world.
 3. If the ransom price has been paid to set every single person free from judgment, then God would be unjust to send anyone to hell.
 4. But the Scriptures make it clear that some people will be sent to hell.
 5. In light of this, the term “all” in verse 6 needs to be interpreted as we have been interpreting the other uses of this term in this passage: to refer to all kinds of people from all over the world.
 6. Jesus offered himself up on the cross in order to save all the elect drawn from every nation, tribe, people, and tongue.
 7. And because the ransom has been paid in full, everyone for whom it was paid will in God’s time be set free from condemnation and

brought into the full enjoying of God for all eternity.

V. Conclusion

- A. In the Arminian controversy in the 17th century Dutch church, the followers of Arminius (later known as the Remonstrants) took issue with the Reformed teaching concerning the doctrine of election and the extent of the atonement, among other matters.
- B. In responding to the Remonstrants, the Synod of Dort was careful to explain that while the Bible clearly teaches that Christ's atoning death was only for the elect, the gospel message is to be preached to all people without distinction.
- C. The Synod said, "The promise of the gospel is that whoever believes in Christ crucified shall not perish, but shall have eternal life. This promise along with the command to repent and believe ought to be announced and proclaimed generally and indiscriminately to all peoples and humans to whom God according to His good pleasure sends the gospel." [Second Head of Doctrine, art. 2]
- D. Sin does provoke God's just and holy wrath, and he will surely condemn every soul who stands before him apart from Christ on the last day.
- E. At the same time, he is not a God who takes pleasure in the destruction of the wicked.
- F. As David says in Psalm 68, "Our God is a God of salvation, and to GOD, the Lord, belong deliverances from death."