

Preacher's Pen points

Inclusive or Exclusive?



It appears to be politically incorrect for one to be “exclusive” today. Any opinion that suggests that some people are not worthy of acceptance in their sinful behavior is considered bigoted, rude, and intolerant. The daily paper frequently publishes articles by people praising the church that is “inclusive” and condemning the church that is “exclusive”. How would the Christian respond to such language? Are we inclusive or exclusive? The answer is “yes”! The church should be both inclusive and exclusive.

Jesus was Inclusive!

It is clear that Jesus reached out to everyone in His society. He pled, “Come unto me, all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest” (Mt. 11:28). Thus His ultimate goal is stated in these powerful words, “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself” (Jn. 12:32). Jesus wanted to offer the blessing of serving God to everyone! Therefore, He receives all who obey the gospel and live by faith (Rom. 15:7; 1:16-17).

Jesus was Exclusive!

However, to say that Jesus reached out to all is not the same thing as saying that He did not exclude others from eternal salvation. Consider this exclusive claim, “I am the way, the truth, and the life; No man comes to the Father but by me!” (Jn. 14:6). Moreover, He boldly proclaimed, “Not everyone who says to me ‘Lord, Lord’, shall enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of my Father in heaven” (Mt. 7:21). Jesus indicated that God’s blessings could only be enjoyed by those who trusted in Him and obeyed the Father’s will. That’s exclusive!

We must be inclusive!

We must follow Jesus’ example and obey His command to the apostles: “Go into all the world and

preach the gospel to every creature” (Mk. 16:15). Like Jesus, we must not shun to declare the word to anyone around us regardless of race, social standing, education, or any other basis men may have for exclusion. That means that our circle of spiritual fellowship includes those Jesus excepts who turn to Him in acceptance of the gospel (1 Jn. 2:23-24) and who continue to live the life of faith (1 Jn. 1:6-7).

We must be exclusive!

But, to reach out to all is not the same as accepting all as they are! Our message is not, “Come as you are and stay as you are!” Our message must be, “God has commanded that all men everywhere repent!” (Ac. 17:31). That means that we must exclude those who do not obey the gospel and who turn from faith again to unbelief (1 Cor. 5:11). Paul wrote to the Corinthian church to “remove the wicked man from among yourselves” (1 Cor. 5:13). That’s exclusive! “Keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them” (Rom. 16:17). That’s exclusive!

We must be both!

We cannot be true to the Scriptures unless we reach out to all men. Likewise we cannot be true to the Scriptures if we accept everybody into our fellowship without distinction. As societal pressure rises on citizens and churches to be more tolerant, we must resist the world’s standard of “toleration”.

Instead of seeking worldly acceptance, let us focus on being accepted by the Lord! Let us, like Paul, ask this question, “For am I now seeking the favor of men or of God? Or am I strive to please men? If were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ (Gal. 1:10).

—Johnny Felker