

The Exclusivity of Christianity

Lee Dodd | *illbehonest.com*

Well, it is really a pleasure to be here. I count it a privilege to come and to preach to you, to encourage you, and attempt to strengthen your hand in the Lord. Let's pray before I begin to preach once more.

Our Father, You have been so entirely good to us. You have been faithful. You have provided for us, cared for us, redeemed us, preserved us, and now You have appointed this stretch of three days where we could come together in the state of Maine and sit under biblical preaching and enjoy Christian fellowship and be strengthened in our faith and our walk with the Lord. Come, Lord Jesus, bless this conference, those that are serving in it, all that has gone into making this happen, and bless us, we pray, with every spiritual blessing that is ours in Christ Jesus. Make these days all that they can be. Make this sermon all that it can be. For the glory of Your great name. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Who Is God?

Go ahead and open your Bibles to the fourth chapter of the book of Acts. Acts 4. We will read the text in a moment, which we'll pick up in verse 8. But by way of introduction, I want to take us back in time for a moment to Sunday morning, January 18th, the year is 2009 when a man by the name of Gene Robinson, the Episcopal bishop of New Hampshire, stood behind a podium on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C. to open the inauguration festivities for Barack Obama. He was the man to lead the prayer of invocation, and he began his prayer that morning with these words: "Oh god of our many understandings, we pray that you will..." and on and on he went. Rather than moral outrage, rather than an eruption of laughter, rather than mass confusion among the listening audience that day, his prayer was actually applauded by so many in our nation as a demonstration of true inclusiveness. That's what they said. Afterwards, being quoted in a New York Times article, Robinson - an openly homosexual Episcopal priest - who had studied previous inaugural prayers said he had been horrified at "how specifically and aggressively Christian those prayers were." He had promised that his prayer would not be overtly Christian, nor would he quote Scripture because he wanted "all people to feel that this is their prayer."

Another generation - the millennial generation - a freelance writer and blogger by the name of Lillian Mongeau once said, "God, Allah, Yahweh, the Creator, the One, the energies goes by as many names in this country as ever. I do believe that God is in everyone though by what name he resides there seems to me to be up to the person in question." She goes on to say that holding such an opinion like this is "simply considered good manners." Good manners. Well, is it simply good manners? Or is it theological nonsense and illogical confusion? The answer is quite clear for those who read their Bibles. In this age of postmodernism, skepticism, subjectivism, religious pluralism comes cheap. Let me put it more plainly. In today's world, where people do whatever feels best, think whatever seems popular at the moment and don't care strongly enough about anything so as to die for it, worshiping a god (with a little 'g') that

feels right and comfortable and friendly is very commonplace, very normal. That is the age we are in.

So few care about what the Bible actually says or what a historically reliable and resurrected Jesus actually said. They just want to go with what feels right. Who needs history? Who really needs an authoritative word from God? Me, the all-important me, can decide what's best for me. These modern views and tendencies among Westerners are not only illogical, they are deadly much like poison. But here in the New England states, you're dealing with this way of thinking all the time. Even more so than what we know and deal with in the state of Texas. This "anything goes" attitude doesn't speckle the landscape of the New England states. It has flooded it. And so the call tonight will be for the church to stand her ground; for individual Christians to stand his or her ground for the Gospel's sake because this must happen if the Kingdom of Christ is going to continue to increase in the earth.

And we come to our text. Read with me the Word of God. Acts 4, picking up in verse 8. I will read through verse 13. This is the Word of God. "Then Peter filled with the Holy Spirit said to them, 'Rulers of the people and elders, if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you and 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 is standing before you well. This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the Cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.' Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John and perceived that they were uneducated common men, they were astonished and they recognized that they had been with Jesus."

Clarity, Combatants, and Calling

This sermon tonight will be much less of an exposition, much more of a topically driven charge. I've broken it down into three parts. I want to address clarity first and foremost. The clarity of the Gospel message. Secondly, combatants - those that are opposing the Gospel message. And then third we will camp out in this area of calling - the responsibility of every Christian to proclaim the Gospel. I don't want to just exhort you all. I want to comfort you as well. And that I will endeavor to do.

The Clarity of the Gospel

Clarity. The clarity of the Gospel message. The voice of the New Testament declares the exclusivity of our Gospel repeatedly. And that is the focus tonight - the exclusivity of Christianity. And that is not a dirty word. The exclusivity of Christianity. The New Testament boldly declares it. In our own text in Acts 4:12, we see that there is but one name. "No other name under heaven by which we must be saved." According to 1 Timothy 2:5, "there's one mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus." One name, one Mediator. According to John 14:6, there is only one Way. "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life and no one comes to the Father except through Me." One Way. According to Ephesians 4:5, we as Christians are those having one Lord, one faith. And according to Paul's strong admonition in Galatians 1, there is only one Gospel. You remember his statement, but "if we or an angel from heaven should

preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed." Why? There is one true and saving Gospel. Only one.

The very name of Jesus illustrates this exclusivity or particularity. Matthew 1:21, "She will bear you a Son and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." Only Jesus has power to save. Well, in no uncertain terms does Jesus Himself declare His authority and exclusivity. Matthew 11:27-28, "All things have been handed over to Me by My Father and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him. Come to Me all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." Jesus has no qualms about this exclusive Gospel. He is not afraid to say salvation is in Me and Me alone. That was the Gospel He brought to needy sinners. Christ alone, if you didn't hear Matthew 11, Christ alone can reveal His Father to sinful men.

What if we just camp out for a minute or two and take a glance at a single Gospel account - John's Gospel - and just walk through together some of the passages that speak of this exclusive Gospel. Chapter 1:12, John 1:12. "But to all who did receive Him (Jesus) who believed in His name, He gave them right to become children of God." Well known verses - John 3:16-18. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him. Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God." How much more clear can the Lord Jesus Christ be? Chapter 6:40, "For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in Him should have eternal life and I will raise him up on the last day." John 11:25, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me though he die, yet shall he live." Chapter 17:3, "And this is eternal life, that they know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent." John 20:31, "But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing, you may have life in His name." One name. One Mediator. One way. One Lord. One faith. One Gospel. This is the exclusivity of Christianity. And that is just a smattering of texts from a single Gospel account in the Scriptures.

Think of Philippians 2 - the Carmen Christi - the hymn to Christ. "Therefore God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father." Did you hear that? Every tongue confess. Every knee bow. This is an exclusive Gospel. You want to have eternal life? It will come only through Jesus Christ. In that last day, we will not stand before a tribunal of gods. We will not stand before a grouping of possible saviors. We will stand before the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords Himself. So, if we are exclusivists, we are those who hold to the Bible's teaching that salvation is through personal faith and repentance - faith in Jesus Christ alone. That's an exclusivist.

The Combatants of the Gospel

But there are combatants, aren't there? Not everybody agrees with what Scripture says. There are contrary views. As you can imagine, there are opponents. In opposition to

exclusivism, there have developed over the centuries a variety of contrary positions. Throughout church history, these have existed in various forms. And even today there are different shades to each of these unbiblical positions. Tonight, with you, I want to cover briefly just three of these opponents.

Inclusivism

First is inclusivism. We have the Bible declaring an exclusive Gospel. Here we're talking about inclusivism. The inclusivist believes that Jesus Christ is the only Savior of sinners. But hold on, don't get too excited. It sounds like the exclusivist at the start, but it is really far from it. While the inclusivist understands Jesus to be the Savior of sinners, they say that one doesn't actually have to know Christ, love Christ, or be submitted to Christ in order to be saved. They believe a person can be saved by Christ apart from any special revelation, apart from faith and repentance in His name. The inclusivist says general revelation is enough. Sadly, major Christian figures of the 20th and 21st centuries have caved on this issue and now hold unbiblical positions that look and feel a lot more like their heretical counterparts than they do the biblical teaching of an exclusive Gospel.

By all appearances, Billy Graham had at least some leanings in this direction. In a television program with Dr. Robert Schuller, "The Hour of Power," Dr. Schuller interviews Billy Graham. And he leads with the question, "Tell me, what do you think is the future of Christianity?" Billy Graham's reply, "Well, you know, I think there's the body of Christ. This comes from all the Christian groups around the world. Outside the Christian groups, I think everybody that loves Christ or knows Christ whether they're conscious of it or not, they're members of the body of Christ. And I don't think that we're going to see a sweeping revival that will turn the whole world to Christ at any time. I think James answered that - the Apostle James - in the First Council in Jerusalem when he said that God's purpose for this age is to call out a people for His name. And that's what God is doing today. He's calling people out of the world for His name. Whether they come from the Muslim world or the Buddhist world or the Christian world or the non-believing world, they are members of the body of Christ because they've been called by God. They may not even know the name of Jesus, but they know in their hearts that they need something they don't have, and they turn to the only light they have. And I think that they are saved and that they're going to be with us in heaven." Dr. Schuller, rather excitedly replied, "What I hear you saying is that it's possible for Jesus Christ to come into a human heart and soul and life even if they've been born in darkness and have never had exposure to the Bible. Is that a correct interpretation of what you were saying?" And Dr. Graham replied, "Yes, it is because I believe that. I've met people in various parts of the world in tribal situations that have never seen a Bible or heard about a Bible, have never heard of Jesus, but they've believed in their hearts that there is a god and they've tried to live a life that was quite apart from the surrounding community in which they live."

So, the inclusivist says Christ's atonement is powerful enough to save apart from faith and repentance; apart from special revelation of Jesus Christ as Lord. According to Billy Graham they don't even need to hear His name. They just need to know that they're missing something in their heart. But this is not what Scripture says. This is not what Jesus has said. This is nothing like what the Apostles preached. Remember Jesus Himself says, "Repent and

believe the Gospel," Mark 1:15. This is the essence of inclusivism. Dangerous, unbiblical. Maybe not heretical. Yet, time and time again, it has proven to be a slippery slope leading many to the realm of pluralism. And that is the second combatant that we will confront.

Pluralism

Pluralism. This is the philosophy that states all roads lead to God. I remember years ago on the UNT campus in Texas - the University of North Texas - there evangelizing, and outside the front of the cafeteria, I looked and there was a booth that was set up. And behind the booth was a giant white poster. And on the lefthand side of that poster, you had Jesus Christ, Moses, Abraham, Krishna, Buddha, Allah. You had all of these major world religion figures. And from each of them pointing to the top right of this giant white chart was sunshine and rainbow. And that represented God. All religious figures leading to God. And I began to dialogue with them, and of course took them to verses that I've taken us to tonight. The Ba'hai faith's founder says, "Our faith teaches that there is one god whose existence is beyond our understanding. He is the creator of everything, and although we may call him by different names - God or Yahweh, Allah, Brahma, or the Great Spirit, we are speaking about the same loving presence that has supported and guided humanity throughout history." This is the philosophy of one light, many lamps. It is an organized pluralism. The pluralist, you see, says that all major religions essentially agree. In today's Western culture, pluralism has made major inroads. We've become a nation of aimless wanderers. The young people of our day - those on the UNT campus, those on the University of Maine campus - the young people of our day are super comfortable with saying "I feel." They may sometimes say, "I think." But they hardly ever say "I know" anymore. Objective truth has taken a distant back seat to subjective feelings. All backbones, all convictions, all certainties have been checked at the airport ticket counter. No pluralist is willing to die for anything. In fact, the pluralist is all about including and wants nothing to do with excluding, except you intolerant folk. You, they will exclude. This is captured by the bumper sticker that probably nearly all of us have seen. That blue bumper sticker with the white lettering that says, "co-exist." This is the pluralist philosophy. They ignore the fact that most major religions are rather exclusive and with a single wave of the vague sensitivity good feelings wand, they dismiss the actual teachings of the world's major religions, talk a lot about oneness, and then gather around the campfire to sing "We Are the World."

But this doesn't work. It's not even logical. Consider just these facts. Buddhists claim that man has no soul. Hinduism claims man is an eternal soul. That sounds a little different, doesn't it? Christianity's foundation is a Gospel of salvation by grace. This reality is non-existent in other world religions. Islam is monotheistic as is Christianity and Judaism. Hinduism understands there to be as many as 330 million gods. Christianity worships a Triune God. Islam and other unitarians reject the idea of Trinity. We could go on and on here in objective, concrete differences between every one of the world's major religions. When we compare Buddha's last words to his disciples which I quote, "Strive without ceasing," to the words of the Lord Jesus Christ, "Come to Me all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," we see clear differences, don't we? We do. Does it really then sound like all religious roads lead to God? Is God so sloppy, so distant, or so weak that He cannot clearly reveal Himself to His creation? You see, pluralism assumes a moral high ground, but in the process insults every major world

religion. The pluralist ignores the distinctives of each religion, and illogically pretends that they are all one and the same. Pluralism misses the mark. It misses the target entirely. The one true God, brethren, has spoken.

Universalism

A third combatant, and I'll be brief. Universalism. The belief that all mankind will eventually be saved. Does the name Rob Bell sound any alarms? What about the current Roman Catholic Pope? Pope Francis was quoted several years ago, saying, "The Lord has redeemed all of us - all of us with the blood of Christ. All of us. Not just Catholics. Everyone." And the reporter replied, "Even athiests?" Pope Francis replied, "Everyone." I don't want to spend a lot of time here. I think we understand the dangers and the falseness of universalism, but the fact is there are many heretical, dangerous views that stand opposed to Christianity's exclusive claims. We have a true fight as the people of God, as the church of God on our hands. One that throughout church history has even gotten bloody at times. Remember the early Christians in Rome, under Caesar in the Roman Empire. Caesar was happy for Christians to worship Christ amongst and alongside other Roman gods. Just say "kaiser kurios" and you can say "Jesus Kurios" all you want. Don't be so particular, Christians. And yet how many precious believers in the first, second, and third century after the resurrection of Jesus Christ, how many gave their lives for this exclusive Gospel?

The Calling of the Christian

Our calling, brethren. Part three. Where I want to camp out for a little while. The responsibility of all Christians to proclaim this exclusive Gospel. To cut to the chase, we can't afford to cower under societal pressures and simply shut our mouths. In the news recently, I imagine many of us have already heard, Joshua Harris, the author of "I Kissed Dating Goodbye" recently in the headlines for departing from his wife and departing from the faith. In his public announcement, he takes upward of 20% of the content of that announcement to apologize for stances on issues he's both written about and spoken about publicly from the pulpit. And now, to his list of apologies, he added in this announcement his views pertaining to the LGBTQ+ movement. Here is a man that has in some measure succumbed to the pressure of our culture. He is in that announcement an admitted apostate. Pray for him. May God have mercy upon him. But here is the reality for you and me, we could be in his shoes should God not preserve us. And it's hard, dear ones. And it's getting harder.

In Texas, on the University of North Texas campus, we have this demographic, most of them in their twenties, that has this "anything goes" attitude, this pluralistic, subjective attitude. I can have it my way. I determine my own reality. We've all heard the nonsense. Yet here, in the New England states, this isn't confined to university campuses. This is the prevalent view among the aristocrats, among the 50-something's, the 40-something's, the 30-something's. As I said earlier, it's not just a here and there in New England. It's everywhere. So I sympathize. It's hard. It's a tough road ahead for the church. But to be quiet with the Gospel is to condemn our neighbors, our unconverted family members, and the world to an eternity in hell. Why? Because the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation. Do we really believe that? We have this exclusive Gospel, but do we believe that it is also a powerful Gospel? A Gospel backed by the

all-powerful One who is mighty to save? Do we really believe that? Because if we believe that, then we can stand with all confidence, lift up our voice in the public sphere or a private living room, because we know we have the one remedy for sinners. Jesus Christ. Doctors of course that refuse to treat dying patients are guilty of malpractice. Yet how much more serious, dear brother and sister in the Lord, is the state of an ever-living soul?

Church history shows us again and again that whenever the church has lost the sharp edge of Gospel proclamation - one way, one Lord, one faith, one Mediator, one name by which you must be saved - it has lost its witness, its influence, and its power. James S. Stewart, the Scottish preacher, once said, "A theologically vague and harmlessly accommodating Christianity is absolutely useless." So, the encouragement is to stand in that line of godly men, to stand with Peter and John in Acts 4. Take their example where they boldly declare the truth: There is no other name by which you must be saved. They are saying with all boldness, with all confidence, only Jesus has the power to save sinners, to heal them, to deliver them. And notice in the text that Peter speaks so boldly before a hostile audience of religious men, but Christ-hating men, and he does so by the power of the Holy Spirit. So much so that those men walk away from the encounter knowing that those two men have been with Jesus Christ. Well, brethren, so too with you and with me will the Holy Spirit empower our witness to the world. We come from a long line of misunderstood saints. God was fulfilling His purposes in them. In the book of Acts, Acts 4, this scene here today, and He's doing so in the life of His church in 2019. We don't have to cower in fear. Luke 21:13-15, "This will be your opportunity to bear witness. Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer, for I will give you a mouth and wisdom which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict." Yes, the world will mock our message and be hostile towards its exclusivity, but to some of our hearers God will come and He will visit them powerfully so. He will come to them and breathe life into them. He will wash them and redeem them. That's the way God works through the Gospel. We are to speak. That's our work. God's work is to save. We pay a small price. We receive the hostility, the remarks, the cruelty. Why? So that others may live.

You may be thinking: Oh, Brother Lee, the world just thinks that Christians are arrogant and intolerant and irrelevant. Arrogant? You need to capture this. Truth is never arrogant. It doesn't involve arrogance. Truth is a matter of fact. Now the delivery of the truth, however, the vessel, the ambassador can be proud and unloving and arrogant. That's true. It's true that our actions and our methodologies will either substantiate the truth we proclaim or undermine it. But the truth itself is never arrogant or proud. To proclaim an exclusive Gospel is not the proclamation of a proud man. It's the proclamation of a man that has been humbled by the grace of God that rescued him. Arrogant? No, not arrogant.

Intolerant? No, not intolerant. Really, Christians should be the most tolerant people in the earth. Paul writes, "Love endures all things." That's pretty tolerant. But this tolerance, this love for our neighbor, doesn't dull the edge of the Gospel blade, it sharpens it. What we shouldn't be able to tolerate though we often do - I, myself, included - what we shouldn't be able to tolerate is the thought of anyone perishing apart from hearing the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That's what we shouldn't tolerate. We won't embrace the lies of this age. We won't agree with false religions. We will stand for an exclusive Gospel that powerfully rescues men from sin. We

will love our neighbors. We will serve the needy. We will minister to the oppressed and share the Gospel with a dying world that needs Jesus. Intolerant? I don't think so.

Irrelevant. God forbid. The Gospel is the furthest thing from irrelevant. It's about as relevant as anything under heaven, likely exceedingly more so. It's the only cure for sinners. Of course, the world would not consider the only cure for cancer to be irrelevant. That would be especially relevant. Well, the Gospel then is no less relevant to the needy sinner. How will then 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? It is relevant, church. So don't let the world put you into the mold of being unkind, unloving, unfair, or arrogant. Is it unloving to share the Gospel of reconciliation with one alienated from God? I don't think so. Is it unkind to speak Gospel encouragements to the broken-hearted? I don't think so. Is it arrogant to offer Christ and eternal life to the dying sinner? Of course not. So preach the Gospel. Brethren, use words. Love the souls of men. Why? Because salvation is in Christ alone. The Gospel is exclusive. Taste and see, dear ones. The Lord is good.

So, dear Christians, stand firm. The cultural onslaught is real and it is growing in strength. Stand firm. Hold the line. Stay with Scripture. Build your house upon the rock. And ask God for more of His Spirit, more of His enabling power, and pray. Pray for one another. You, brethren, need one another. The churches of New England need one another. Pray. Pray. Pray. The Joshua Harris's of the world will fall away. Others in the coming years, no doubt, will fall away. Pray, dear church. Pray.

Let's pray. Father, the reality of an exclusive Gospel is so plain in the Scriptures and it's so significant. Write this reality on our heart. Imprint it on the depths of our soul and cause us to cling to it with all that is in us by the power of the Holy Spirit which You provide. Keep Your people standing for the truth, standing for this exclusive Gospel until they can breathe no more. Bless this sermon to us. In Jesus' name, Amen.