

**SCRIPTURE READING:** Ephesians 4:1-6.

**INTRODUCTION:** According to Michael J. Vlach, Ph.D.,

1. Inclusivism -- *"One religion is best but salvation is possible in other religions"*
2. Exclusivism -- *"Salvation is found in only one religion"* (TheologicalStudies.Org)

From time to time people ask me to preach on particular topics. This morning's lesson is presented in response to a request that I preach on the subject of inclusivism vs. exclusivism. I hope this sermon meets the needs generating the request. If not, please follow up with me and I'll do my best to answer any questions you still have.

**DISCUSSION:**

1. Is Christianity inclusive or exclusive? People who call themselves Christians argue for both.
2. What does the Bible say?
3. Assume that the blank white PowerPoint screen = all living, accountable people. From now on, when I talk about people in this lesson, I mean living, accountable people.
4. Are all people saved? Do people even need religion? Luke 13:22-28; Acts 16:30-34; 1 Corinthians 1:18.
5. Assume that the small square in the middle of the otherwise blank PowerPoint screen = saved people.
6. How are people saved? John 8:24; 14:6; Ephesians 4:4.
7. Christianity is not inclusive. It is exclusive.
8. This doesn't mean Christians are arrogant or hateful. It just means that we believe that the Bible is the word of God, that we are acting consistent with what we understand it to mean, and that we do so because we love people and want them to be saved.

**APPLICATIONS:** Since Christianity is exclusive ...

1. To get and stay saved, we must respect the teaching of Christ. Matthew 7:21-23; Galatians 1:6-9; 2 John 9-11.
2. We can't respect the teaching of Christ and treat people as saved if they haven't done what God says they must do to be saved. Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:37-41.
3. We can't respect the teaching of Christ and treat people as saved if, once saved, they quit doing what God says they must do to stay saved. Colossians 1:21-23; 1 Corinthians 5:9-13.
4. We can't respect the teaching of Christ and violate our conscience.
  - A. To us, some things are clearly right, some things are clearly wrong, and some things fall somewhere in between.
  - B. Why? It's not because some things are half right and half wrong. God doesn't accept anything as right that has anything wrong about it. 1 John 1:5. No, we see some things as gray because we haven't yet come to a full understanding of the will of God.
  - C. Okay, what do we do until we Ephesians 4:13?
  - D. Some say if something might be right, then we must accept it because we can't say it's wrong. Others say if something might be wrong, then we must not accept it because we can't say it's right. What does the Lord say? Colossians 3:17; Ephesians 5:8-10; Romans 14:5B, 22-23.
  - E. Yes, it is wrong to condemn what God may not have condemned. But that doesn't mean there's not a place for warning people who approve what God may not have approved.
  - F. If I don't fellowship something because my conscience won't allow it, that doesn't necessarily mean I absolutely know it's wrong. No, if I'm not sure something is right, it means:
    - 1) It is wrong for me.
    - 2) I am binding my conscience, not something God has not bound. 1 Corinthians 8:4-13; 10:28-29A.
    - 3) If you force me to choose between violating my conscience or leaving a local church, I must leave and it's likely you'll sin by forcing me to choose. The last sin in Galatians 5:20 literally means, "to take, choose." 2 Peter 2:1-2 "heresies;" Titus 3:10-11.
    - 4) I think you are playing Russian roulette with your soul.
    - 5) If I love you, I'm going to tell you why I don't think you should do it.
    - 6) I am not going to recommend local churches or preachers who might imperil people's souls.

- 7) You might have a hard time seeing the difference between me and someone who is sure it is wrong, but we are different.

**CONCLUSION:** Many people are offended by the exclusivism of Christianity both without and within its ranks. I am not offended if, for example, a Muslim thinks I am lost. I think the same of him. Neither of us thinks this way because we hate each other. Rather, we think this way because it's how we feel given our current convictions. The answer is not to ignore our differences and pretend that our respective writings don't teach such things. Rather, the answer is to help each other discover which of us is wrong so the one in error might change. This same approach should be taken when it comes to differences in matters of Christian faith. We shouldn't vainly attempt to decide what teachings are and aren't important to salvation. Everything God teaches is important. Matthew 4:4. Rather, we should 2 Timothy 2:15, make the applications listed above, and Acts 17:11 until we Ephesians 4:13.