

Exclusivity: How Can There Be Just One True Religion?

by Tim Keller

The speaker argues that the problem of exclusivity in religion is not solved by trying to weaken or eliminate it, but rather by recognizing the spiritual realm and its influence, and embracing the exclusivity of Christianity.

Duration: 39:15

Scripture: 1 John 4:9

Topics: "Exclusivity"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher addresses the objection of exclusivity in Christianity and other religions. He uses the illustration of blind men encountering an elephant to explain that no one has the complete understanding of spiritual truth. Each blind man in the story perceives a different aspect of the elephant, but none of them can see the whole picture. Similarly, religions have different perspectives on spiritual truth, and no one should claim to have the entire truth. The preacher emphasizes the importance of love and how it is a manifestation of God's nature. He concludes by stating that Christianity, like other religions, offers a partial understanding of spiritual truth, and we should approach it with humility and love for one another.

Transcript

The scripture is from 1 John 4, verses 1-10. Dear Friends, Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God.

Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world. You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.

They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us, but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.

Dear Friends, Let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

This is how God showed His love among us. He sent His one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him. This is love--not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

This is the Word of the Lord. We're starting a new series tonight, and each week for the next few weeks we're going to select one of the main objections, one of the main problems, one of the main troubles that people in our culture have with Christianity and look at it. And tonight the objection, the trouble people have with Christianity we're going to be looking at can be summed up in one word.

It's the word exclusivity. And it's not a problem that people only have with Christianity, but other religions too. And the problem is, how can you possibly claim that your religion is the only true religion? That you have the one truth? This is a matter of enormous concern right now.

I mean, we're really at the peak of this. Forty years ago, if you'd asked people, what is the main barrier to peace in the world, they probably would have said political ideology, because that was the Cold War, you know, communism, capitalism, even 30 years ago, maybe even 20 years ago. But today I think most people would say that the main barrier to peace in the world is religion, and especially religious exclusivity.

There's a flood of books coming out right now talking about how religion divides us internationally, how religion divides us at home, how many of the issues that we're facing right now are religious in nature. And I want to start right off, perhaps some of you will be surprised, since I'm a Christian minister, I want to start right off by agreeing that religion, generally speaking, has a very strong tendency to divide people, has a very strong tendency to create strife amongst human beings. In fact, I would go so far as to say that religion tends to create a slippery slope in the heart that tends to move all the way down to even oppression and violence.

You see, if you tell a group of people, you have the truth and you are saved by performing that truth, that has to lead to a feeling of superiority to the people who are not performing the truth. In turn, that leads to a separation. You tend to pull away from those impure people, and then you become unfamiliar with them.

And then you're able to believe the worst about them, and you have stereotypes and caricatures in your mind about them. And that finally creates a condition for you to either passively acquiesce or actively participate in the marginalization or the oppression of other groups of people with different beliefs. You can dehumanize them in your mind.

You can feel like they deserve it. And there are so many examples of this in the world, in history, and there's so many examples of it right now, I don't even have to go into it. I don't think anybody's going to disagree.

But once you realize that religion erodes peace on earth between human beings, when you realize that religion has this deeply divisive effect on people, what are you going to do? What do we do? We have to do something. And I would suggest that right now people are trying to address the divisiveness of religion in two ways. There are two main strategies people are taking right now, and I'd like to show you that they won't work.

And then I'd like to lastly give you a strategy that I think will. There's two ways to deal with the divisiveness of religion that won't work and one way that will. The passage that we've just read is, on the one hand, it indirectly speaks to the two strategies that won't work, but it very directly addresses and lays out the strategies that will.

So let's look at it. First of all, the two strategies that won't work. The first way people are dealing with the divisiveness of religion is they are hoping for or helping religion to weaken.

They're calling for religion to weaken. They're hoping in helping religion to weaken and maybe even disappear. You see, for many decades, the intelligentsia of North America and Western Europe, especially Western Europe, believed that religion was going to die out because as human beings became more and more technologically advanced, the need for religion wouldn't be there.

It was kind of an evolutionary view of religion. A religion used to help us adapt to our environment, but no longer we don't need it. So it was going to thin out.

That was the theory. And religion become less dogmatic and eventually die out altogether. That hasn't happened at all.

And almost all the major world religions are growing and some of them growing very, very rapidly. And I don't think I have to go into the details about it. As a Christian minister, I know my own statistics, you know, religion statistics better than others.

So, you know, Africa, for example, has gone from 9% to almost 50% Christian in 100 years as a continent. Korea, for example, as a nation, has gone from about 1% to something like 45, 50% in 100 years. China is doing something similar in the next 100 years, everybody believes.

And that'll really have an impact on the future, the history of the world. But the point is nobody is any longer saying that religion is just going to die out or weaken as we get more modern and advanced. That's the reason why some governments and some people have said, we see the divisiveness of religion, so we're going to regulate it.

We're going to try to control it. The irony here is that the more you try to stamp out or control religion, the more it grows. Perfect example of that is how when communists took over China in the late 1940s, they threw out the Christian Western missionaries and they said, well, that's the last we'll see of Christianity.

And all they did was they made Chinese Christianity more indigenous and it spread even more rapidly. And why is it that religion doesn't seem to go away? And when you try to weaken it, it actually strengthens it. Why? I told you there's only hints in the text about these.

But in verse 1, read what verse 1 says. It says, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. Now, it's very clear that the writer John is talking about teachers, religious teachers and prophets.

So why doesn't he say test the prophets or test the teachers? Why does he say test the spirits? John Stott wrote a little commentary on 1 John. And when he gets to these verses, he says something intriguing. He says, you mustn't make the mistake to think that religious diversity and religious views are merely intellectual or cognitive phenomena.

Like political views, you have a lot of political views, you have a lot of religious views. Because what this text is saying is behind the range of religious views, there's a range of real spiritual influences. There's a spiritual realm, there's a transcendent realm and human beings sense it and want to connect to it.

And every human being will worship something, will revere something, will make something their ultimate concern. Now, this passage is saying that that's not all good. That you could fix your heart and worship something that enslaves you rather than frees you.

That turns you to hatred rather than love. But the main point here is that the religious impulse is not just an intellectual thing. That the need for something to worship, spirituality, religion is an indelible, unavoidable part of human nature.

And if you just try to stamp it out, you're only going to create more strife. So that'll never work. The idea of weakening religion, calling for its weakening, helping it to weaken, to try to disappear, no.

The second strategy though that people are trying to use in order to deal with the divisiveness of religion is much more prevalent and a lot more plausible. And that strategy is this, confine religion to the private realm. Confine religion to the private realm.

See, this strategy says, we're not against religion. Let a thousand million religious flowers bloom. Go ahead, have your religion.

But let's keep it in the private realm. Then we can all live together. And what they mean is this.

They say, all the people in society, whatever your religious beliefs, we ought to agree on two things. First, we need to agree that all religions are equally valid paths to God. That way you won't try to convert everybody to yours or say you have the superior one.

Okay, so number one, all religions are equally valid paths to God. And secondly, the second thing we have to agree on is that religion is good to give you strength in your private life, but never bring it out into public discourse. Never argue for values in society that are based on your particular religious faith.

Now, there's great problems with these two. Listen, people are saying this all the time. You can read it every day in almost any newspaper, any magazine that you pick up.

You'll see people saying it. You may believe it. You know, lots of your friends believe it under any circumstances.

But neither of those statements can hold water. This strategy will not succeed. Again, there's a hint of why in the text.

And the hint is in verse five, where it says, they are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world and the world listens to them. And now, who's they? The they are critics of Christianity. But interestingly, the writer, John, says that they are coming from a religious faith viewpoint as well.

They've got a viewpoint. They've got a vantage point. They have a faith position, even as they are criticizing ours.

You say, what does that mean? What do you mean by that? Well, here, let's go. Let's go with these two things that people say. Number one, people say, let's all agree that all religions are equally valid paths to

God.

Well, when someone says that to me, I say, that's a naked assertion, not an argument. Would you please tell me why I should believe that? Why should I believe that? And usually the person says, well, the fact is that no one has the right to say they have all the spiritual truth. We all see in part.

We all see pieces. Who dares to say they see the whole picture? And then they'll get out an illustration, which I hope you've heard, so I won't have to spend too much time on it. And it's a kind of fun illustration.

It's about a group of blind men who come up to an elephant. I imagine if you think about the illustration a little bit, a bunch of blind men would sort of run into the elephant, you know, I guess. So there's a group of blind men in the illustration that come up upon an elephant.

And they all grab hold of it. And everyone begins to say what the elephant is like. And one grabs hold of the trunk and says, ah, elephants are long and flexible creatures.

But then another one has a hold of the leg and says, no, no, no, no, no, no. Elephants are very short and thick and stiff creatures. They're not long and flexible.

They're short and stiff. And another blind man has a hold of the side and says, you're not right at all. It's huge and flat.

And they begin to argue. And each one says, no, no, your view of the elephant isn't right. And as they're arguing, we realize that every one of them is right and every one of them is wrong.

They all have part of reality of the elephant. They grasp part of it. But nobody can see the whole picture.

And therefore, none of them should say they see the whole picture. They all see part of the reality. Nobody sees the whole reality.

They're all partly right and they're all partly wrong. And so the illustration concludes religions are the same. All religions see part of the spiritual truth.

Nobody can see the whole thing. No one should insist that they have the entire truth. And that's how we ought to understand religions.

Leslie Newbigin, who was a British missionary to India for many years, writes in a book called *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* that over the years, he got that illustration thrown at him over and over and over. How can you say you see the whole thing? Nobody sees all the religions are like the blind man. And one day he was listening to it and it suddenly hit him.

The only way you could know that none of the blind men had a grip on the entire reality of the elephant was if you could see the whole elephant. The only way you could tell the story of the blind man and the elephant is if you saw the whole elephant. You could only tell about the blind man if you see.

And that means he suddenly realized the only way you could possibly know that every religion only sees part of the truth is if you assume that you see all of the truth. It's the only way you could know that religions only see part of the truth is if you assume you have the whole truth, which is the very thing you say nobody's got. And so, Leslie Newbigin concludes this page in which he suddenly realized how incredibly arrogant and imperialistic intellectually it is to say all religions are equal.

And he says, there is an appearance of humility in the protestation that the truth is much greater than any one of us can grasp. But it may be, in fact, an arrogant claim to a kind of knowledge which is superior to all others. So we have to ask the person, what is this absolute vantage point from which you claim to be able to relativize all the claims these different scriptures and religions make? Here's the point here is, when you say no one has a superior take on spiritual reality, that is a take on spiritual reality, which you say is superior to everybody else's.

And when you say no one should convert everybody else to your view of religious reality, that is a view of religious reality that you want the listener to convert to. There is no way for you to know that all religions are equal unless you assume the kind of knowledge you say nobody has, and so how dare you have it? How can you have it? So it just doesn't work. It doesn't work in the slightest.

It's imperialistic. It looks humble, but it's not. Let's look at the second part.

And the second part is, keep your religion private. Let it give you strength and inspiration in your private life. But don't ever come out into the public discourse and argue for values in society based on your particular religious belief.

Now, the person who's probably put forth this idea the best, most prominently, is the American philosopher Richard Rorty. And Richard Rorty, actually, if he was in the sermon, if he was listening to the sermon up to now, he would say, hold your horses. I'm not trying to impose my view of spiritual reality.

I'm just a pragmatist. In fact, he actually says that he's in the tradition of John Dewey and the pragmatist. And here's what he means.

He says, I'm just telling you this. You've got to leave your religion at the door when you come into the public square. You've got to leave your views of truth and morality and right and wrong and religion at the door when you come into the public square.

Because these things are based on faith, and no one can ever adjudicate them. And therefore, they're controversial, and we'll fight forever. No, no, no.

Let us all leave our religion in the private world. And when we come into the public realm, let's simply look for strategies that work. Let's look at the problems that face us, like education and poverty and issues like that.

And let's just simply not look for strategies and policies that are in line with your view of religion or your view of truth or your view of right or wrong. But let's just find the ones that work. Let's just find ones that work.

There's a huge problem with that. I know that sounds plausible. Because we live in a society in which right now that approach is the one that's put forth.

But it'll never work. And here's the reason why. Ironically, it's totally impractical.

And here's why. What does Rorty mean? What do you mean, class? What is religion? Well, sometimes people say, well, religion is a set of beliefs and you go to services once a week and... No, no, no, no, no. What's really religion in the fullest sense? Don't hide behind the idea of institutional religion.

What's religion? Religion is a set of answers to the big questions. Why are we here? What is right and wrong for human beings to be doing? What is... What's wrong with the human race and what will fix it? And how do we decide right and wrong? And what should we be spending most of our time doing? What are the most important things to be doing? Now, nobody can operate in life without a set of answers to those questions. And those answers are at least implicitly religious because you can't prove those things in a lab.

Whatever your answer is, it's a faith assumption. It's a religious belief. You may not see it as religious belief, but it is.

And so let me give you an example of how impossible it is to do what Rorty says. It is impossible to leave your religious beliefs at the door when you come out in the public world at all. Let me give you an example that's right away.

You're going to... Some of you are going to think it's kind of a silly example. I'm deliberately choosing it because it seems irrelevant. Let's talk about divorce laws, alimony, things like that.

Why? Well, I'll show you why. Surely Richard Rorty would say, when it comes to... If you're in a secular society and you're working on divorce laws, you do not bring your religion to bear on divorce laws. Let's all come together and let's just decide on divorce laws that really will just work for people.

But that'll depend on what you think works will depend on your view of the purpose of marriage. And anybody's view of the purpose of marriage is rooted in deeply held beliefs about human nature and human flourishing. So for example, if you're like the people in individualistic Western societies, you believe that the needs of the individual is more important than the needs of the group.

The needs of the individual is more important than the needs of the family. And you will see the purpose of marriage as the happiness and emotional fulfillment of the adults who enter it. And therefore, you will make divorce easy because that's the purpose of marriage.

I mean, if it becomes something that's not fulfilling anymore, the people ought to be able to get out of it easily. But what if you are someone like the people in a traditional society? And in traditional societies, they believe the family is more important than the individual. The family is much more important than individual happiness.

And the purpose of marriage is to create safe and secure space for the nurturing of children, for the extended family, and for society as a whole. And if you believe that the family is more important than the individual, you're going to make divorce really, really hard. And now suddenly you suddenly see something, don't you? You can't come to any conclusions about what will work in divorce, except on the basis of deeply held beliefs about human flourishing and what makes people happy and what's right with people and what's wrong with people.

And therefore, if you say, keep your religion out of the public realm, what you really are meaning is, my Enlightenment Western individualistic faith assumptions about human nature are privileged over yours. I can bring mine into the public realm, but you can't bring your more traditional religious views in. Do you see? It's being said every day, but more and more people are recognizing what hypocrisy that is.

Michael Perry, who's a church state scholar, expert, legal guy at Wake Forest University, actually says at one point this. He says, to say religious reasoning must be kept out of the public square because it's

faith-based and it's controversial is itself a faith-based statement, which is incredibly controversial. And therefore, on its own terms, ought to be thrown out.

Now, here's where we are. Somebody's saying, where are we? I'll tell you where we are. Everybody has a take on spiritual reality, which is based on a set of religious assumptions based on faith.

And everybody thinks their take on spiritual reality is better and other people should adopt it and the world would be a better place. And therefore, everybody's got a set of exclusive beliefs. Everybody's got a set of exclusive beliefs.

Let me say that again. Everybody's got a set of exclusive beliefs. And therefore, what really is a matter is not who's got exclusive beliefs and... No.

Which set of exclusive beliefs can produce loving, inclusive, reconciling, peaceful behavior? Don't say, oh, Christians, you've got exclusive beliefs, but I don't. You don't know yourself. You may not think you do, but you do.

You've got... Everybody's got exclusive beliefs. So therefore, the real question is, which set of exclusive beliefs produce the most peace-loving, reconciling, inclusive behavior? That's what you want to know. And so thirdly, I would like to talk about one strategy for dealing with the divisiveness of religion that will work.

What is that one strategy? Is to look at the things about the Christian gospel that are unique to Christianity and different from all other religions. Because they are the things, the very things, that will empower you to be agents of reconciliation and peace in the world. I know what I just said is counterintuitive in a place like New York City.

See, most people would say, look, if you want to be a Christian, okay, be a Christian. But don't stress what's different. Don't stress what's different about you versus other religions.

Let's talk about what we all have in common. Let's not stress the things where Christianity is different. Let's stress what we have in common.

But I would like to say, of course, Christianity has lots in common with other religions. But those aren't the features that will radically turn you into an agent for reconciliation in the world. Let me show you first, I know this is counterintuitive, three things that this text tells us are unique and distinct about Christianity compared to other religions.

And then how when you take them into your heart and understand what they really mean, it will turn you into an agent of peace. Number one, let's look at the three things that this text says are totally different about Christianity, different from other religions. First of all, the origin of Jesus' salvation.

Secondly, the purpose of Jesus' salvation. Thirdly, the method of Jesus' salvation. Real quick.

First, the origin of Jesus' salvation. Verse two, this is how you can recognize the Spirit of God. Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God.

Did you notice what it just said there? Jesus Christ has come. It didn't say he was born. Now, of course, he was born too.

But no one ever talks like that. To say he has come means he was somewhere before he was in the world. He was somewhere else.

And this is an implicit claim which is made explicitly elsewhere in the book, the Gospel of John and the Epistles of John. And that is that whereas every other religion says its founder is a human being only, Christianity says in Jesus Christ, God comes into the world. God comes into the world.

That's the first uniqueness, the origin of Jesus' salvation. Secondly, the purpose of Jesus' salvation. It says Jesus Christ has come in the flesh.

Question, why put it like that? Why in the flesh? Why is that important? Because that's another area in which Christianity and biblical religion is so different than other kinds. Other religions see the purpose of salvation to liberate you from the flesh, to escape the flesh. That's the problem, the physical world.

Some religions say your problem is the physical world is an illusion and you overcome it and you're liberated from it through changes of consciousness. Other religions, those are mainly Eastern religions, Western religions tend to say that the flesh is real, but it's bad and through morality or spiritual experience, you can escape and go to heaven. But see, all other religions say that the purpose of salvation is to escape this nasty world and go to heaven where everything is fine.

But Christianity says that at the birth of Jesus, God received a body and at the resurrection of Jesus, we see that the salvation of God is not to escape the flesh, but redeem it. Not to escape this world, but redeem and renew this physical world, this material world. Get rid of the death, get rid of disease, get rid of poverty, get rid of injustice, get rid of what's broken about the world.

So Vinod Ramachandra says something amazing about Christian salvation. He says, Christian salvation lies not in an escape from this world, but in the transformation of this world. You will not find hope for this physical world in any other religious system or philosophy.

The biblical vision is unique and that is why if someone says, surely there's salvation in other faiths. I always ask them, what salvation are you talking about? Not this salvation. No faith holds out a promise of eternal salvation for the world like the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ do.

So that's the second unique thing. The first unique thing, Jesus is God, not just a man. The second unique thing, the purpose of salvation is the restoration of this material world.

And the third thing that's unique about Christianity is the method of grace. In all other religions, we've talked about this all night. In all other religions, we're told if you want to be saved, you have to perform the truth, which means you have to love God.

You have to love other people. You have to love your family. You have to love your neighbor.

And if God sees you loving him and loving your neighbor and loving your family, then God will bless you and save you. That's not what the gospel says at all, at all. Rather, the gospel says, look at verse 10, famous but radical.

This is love, not that we love God, not that we love God, but that he loved us and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. God comes and sacrificially pours himself out and suffers for the people who don't love him, who aren't good, who aren't virtuous, who aren't loving one another. Jesus is not mainly a

teacher who comes to tell us how we should live so that by living so we can be saved.

Jesus is a savior who lives the life we should have lived and dies the death we should have died in our place, in our stead, and pays the penalty for sin. So non-loving, non-virtuous, non-performers of the truth can be saved by radical grace. Now, those are three things that are unique about biblical Christian religion.

And you say, so what? Isn't the important thing that we just love one another? See, when you get down to verse 7 and 8, everybody gets really excited. Love, love one another, love the world. God so loved the world.

Love, that's what's important. Let's not talk about doctrine. Let's not talk about Jesus' divinity and Jesus' resurrection and his substitutionary atonement.

Those things divide. Let's just love. But you're not reading the text because the text says that unless your religious impulses, unless the spirit moving you confesses these unique distinctives of Christianity, your spiritual impulse might enslave you or turn you to hate other people.

No, no, no. It's these very distinctive things that will, if you take them into the center of your being, turn you into the very thing the world so desperately needs, an agent of peace and reconciliation. How so? Let's go back through them and we're done.

Let's look, first of all, at the method of grace. The Bible says, the gospel says, you're not saved by your performance because in religion, you're saved by your performance. And that's what creates the slippery slope.

If you believe I'm saved because I'm performing the truth, you've got to be superior to other people. You've got to look down at other people. That's what creates the slippery slope.

Self-righteousness, superiority, and that leads to oppression. But I want you to know in a place like New York City, the alternative, which is secularism, isn't much help. Because have you ever noticed the secularists are every bit as self-righteous as moralists? They say, oh, you see, I'm the enlightened person.

You're the primitive religious people. You're the reason for the problems of the world. Of course, the moralists are looking at the secularists saying, you dirty secularists, you're the problem with the world.

You're out there, you know, dogs and cats living together, mass hysteria. That's from Bill Murray, if you remember, Ghostbusters 1. Popular cultural reference. Say each group looks down their nose at the other, but the gospel is the only faith system I know that leads you to expect that people who don't believe like you believe will be better than you.

What? Yes. Because the gospel says you're not saved because you're wise. You're not saved because you're good.

You're not saved because you're virtuous. You're not saved because you're performing the truth. You're saved because Jesus performs the truth.

And you can't get his salvation unless you admit that you're not any better than anybody else, that you're a sinner and you need grace. And therefore, the gospel leads you to expect that the people who don't agree with you could easily be and usually are better people than you. Wiser, nicer, more disciplined, more

self-control.

Kinder, less likely to fly off the handle. And they are. Every other system of thought leads you to believe that you'll be better than the people who don't believe the right things.

But the gospel says if you believe the gospel, you're likely to see other people who don't believe the gospel better than you. In other words, the gospel humbles you before the people who don't agree with you. Humbles you.

I don't know of any other system that would do that. Secondly, the resurrection. If religions say, this world doesn't matter.

This world is just going to hell. All that matters is heaven. All that matters is the next life.

See, if that's what you believe, and most religions teach that, then all that really matters is you convert more people to your tribe and your tribe grows so you go to heaven. And who cares about the world? Who cares about the problems of the world? It's going to hell anyway. But if the purpose of salvation, according to the Bible, is a new heavens and new earth, is a transformed world where death and poverty and disease and suffering are gone, then for you to be working with God, you're working to make this a good world.

This is the kind of salvation that leads to Jeremiah 29, where God says to the children of Israel, go into the pagan city of Babylon and seek its peace, seek its prosperity. All those wicked pagans, make that city a great city for them to live in. Work for the shalom, work for the prosperity of the city.

And that view of salvation doesn't just humble you. In other words, the gospel salvation doesn't just humble you before people who don't believe what you believe so that you know that they, in many cases, are morally your betters. But the gospel salvation says, serve them.

Serve the city of New York. Make this a great place for all the people of the city to live, because that's what God is seeking to do. And that is to bring a new heavens and new earth.

But last of all, the last distinctive. Jesus is not just a human being. Jesus is not just another prophet or teacher.

He is God come in the flesh. Now, a lot of people would say, well, now, OK, at that point, though, I can understand why the distinctive of gospel grace would humble you. And the distinctive of gospel resurrection and the purpose of salvation would lead you to serve people who disagree with you and humble you.

But if you really believe that Jesus is God, that's going to lead to self-righteousness, huh? You're going to say, oh, you go to another religion, do you? Your founder is only a human being. My founder is God. Jesus is God.

Your founder is just a prophet. My founder is God. Surely that's going to lead to self-righteousness.

It didn't. One of the great paradoxes of history is the fact that when Christianity began to grow in the earliest days, the Greeks and the Romans had what looked like inclusive theology. They said, everybody's got a God.

You've got your God. I've got my God. They've got their God.

Nobody has... There's no God for everybody. Everybody has their own God. That was the Greco-Roman paganism.

And it seems so inclusive, does it not? Sure. And then along comes Christians and they say, Jesus is Lord of all. That seems so very exclusive.

So paganism, inclusive beliefs. Christianity looked to be very exclusive. And yet the simple fact of history is that Christianity created the most inclusive community in history up to that time.

Nobody had ever seen anything like it. The Greeks and the Romans didn't mix rich and poor. Christians did.

The Jews didn't mix the races. Christians did. Why would such an exclusive belief that Jesus is God lead to the most inclusive, peace-loving behavior, humble behavior? And the answer is, think.

If Jesus isn't just a great guy, but God, then in Jesus Christ, ultimate reality has become visible. And when ultimate reality becomes visible, you know what he is? You see a man on the cross loving people who don't love him. Ultimate reality for a Christian is a man on a cross, loving people who don't love him, forgiving people who are abusing him, sacrificially serving people who oppose him.

And when the early Christians took that into the very heart of their life, that that's ultimate reality. How could they coerce? How could they trample? How could they be cruel at all to anyone? They couldn't be. And if you take it into the center of your life, you can't be either.

See, everyone has got a set of exclusive beliefs. And Christianity has got exclusive beliefs. But which set of beliefs leads to the most inclusive behavior? I submit this.

Take moralistic religion into the center of your life, and you'll feel superior to the secularists. Take secularism into the center of your life, and you'll feel superior to all those stupid religious people. Take the gospel into the center of your life, and you'll be humbled before people who don't believe what you believe.

You'll seek to serve the people who don't believe what you believe. And you'll know that a man who loves people who don't love him is what your whole life is built on. Do you want this incredible force to be released into the world? I hope you do.

Here's how you do it. If you believe the gospel, believe it more deeply than you ever have before. And if you don't believe the gospel, consider believing it and become part of what the world needs.

Let us pray. Thank you, Father, for giving us this remarkable, almost paradoxical truth that the exclusivity of Christian teachings leads to humble service, reconciling behavior, non-patronizing, non-self-righteous love of people who differ with us. Father, an awful lot of people who name the name of Christ don't seem to have thought that out because they're not showing that behavior.

We repent as a body and ask that you'd help us to believe the gospel and become what we ought to be. We pray all this in Jesus' name. Amen.

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