



Conducted by
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“I have often heard it said that the Church of Christ is too exclusive. Would you give me your views on this because it troubles me when I hear people talk like this.”

Let us be absolutely clear on one thing, and let us state it with all the vigour we can to other people; the Church of Christ excludes no one. How can the Church exclude people when Christ its Head, stated, “For God so loved the world that he

gave his one and only Son, that whoever 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 to save the world through him" (John 3:16,17 N.I.V.) (The reader will understand, of course, that 'the world' means the people in it). The plain and unmistakeable message of the Bible is that **anyone** who comes to God in faith and obedience to His Christ can be a partaker of the grace of God. So taking the above into account we can be sure that neither God nor Christ would exclude anyone from salvation, and as the Church is the body of Christ then it has no right to exclude people if He **includes** them. But this statement needs some clarification so that we shall not misunderstand the answer to this important and serious question.

INVITATIONS

The verb 'to invite' means 'to request courteously to come.' Invitations come to us in several ways.

We may be invited to a wedding or some other function. The invitation usually specifies by **name** who is to attend. Therefore, anyone so invited is included: conversely, anyone who is not invited by name is excluded. It follows, of course, that any one who is invited by name has the right to refuse the invitation. The invitation to salvation given by God is **not** of this nature: if it were, then God would have to choose who should be saved. This He does not do.

Then there is the invitation to apply for a job: this invitation usually comes via newspapers and other agencies. This type of invitation is normally accompanied by requirements of academic qualifications or skills levels on the part of the applicant, and so excludes all others who do not possess such qualifications or skills. God's invitation is not like **this**, although, as we shall see, He **does** make certain requirements of us in His Word, the Bible. But sufficient to say, **anyone**, even those who consider themselves to be the deepest-dyed sinners may respond to the invitation: it is the nature of the response which is important.

There is also the **general** invitation: this is to all who want to respond to it. In theory, this type of invitation is not exclusive: in practice, it is. There will be many who will never hear of the invitation and so will be excluded. There will be many who will ignore it, and so will be excluded. There will be many who will want to respond but will not want to fulfil any requirements: they will want to try some other way, and in so doing they will **hope** that they will not be excluded. It seems to me that this is the way that God's invitation through the Gospel is received by people. He wants to include all, and so makes a general invitation through the Word: it is we, the invited, by our refusal to accept who make God's Will exclusive.

EXCLUSIONS

We know that the verb 'to exclude' means 'to shut out from.' We also know that it is not the intention of God to exclude anyone, therefore, we ask ourselves, "who does the excluding?" The short answer is, of course, we ourselves.

One of the ways in which we exclude ourselves is by not being ready. You remember the parable of the ten virgins who were waiting for the coming of the bridegroom. All of them knew that it was the custom at Jewish weddings for the bridegroom to tarry for a long period of time before he came to the wedding ceremony, but they didn't know the precise time that he would appear. The foolish virgins were wrong on two accounts; they hadn't taken sufficient oil for the lengthy wait, and consequently they were totally unprepared when the time came. The door was shut against them. Who was responsible for their exclusion? Was it the one who shut the door? No, because they weren't there ready to enter while the door was open. Was it the wise virgins? No, they had prepared for **themselves** and that was all they could do. Was it the foolish virgins themselves? Yes, by their state of unreadiness they had

excluded themselves. The message is clear. The Lord is coming again. It will be our fault if we are not ready to meet Him (see Matt. 25:1-13).

Another way to exclude ourselves is by relying on our own standard of righteousness. We think that our own way is best. The Scribes and Pharisees thought that way as well, but Jesus taught His disciples "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of Heaven" (Matt. 5:20). The Apostle Paul in his letter to Rome said, "There is none righteous, no, not one" (Rom. 3:10). How do we, then, learn of the righteousness that God will accept? Listen to Paul again, "But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets. Even the righteousness of God which is by faith in Jesus Christ unto all and upon all that believe: for there is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:21-23). So if we rely on our own righteousness to get us to Heaven, and we are excluded because of that, who is to blame? We are!

One of the surest ways to exclude ourselves is by maintaining a stubborn will in spite of the pleadings of God for us to yield. Matthew records that Jesus sadly looked out on Jerusalem and said, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not. Behold, your house is left unto you desolate" (Matt. 23:37,38). Here we see the Saviour yearning to save the lost. All they have to do is come to him in faith and obedience, and yet their stubborn wills hold them back. Is it any different in the twentieth century? What chilling words the Saviour had to utter out of a heart filled with love and pain, "Behold your house is left unto you desolate." Who does the excluding in this respect? We do!

We could go on giving example after example but I feel sure the point is made quite clearly.

LET GOD BE TRUE

Paul in his letter to Rome says, "For what if some did not believe? shall their belief make the faith of God without effect? God forbid: yes, let God be true, but every man a liar" (Rom. 3:3,4)

I get rather impatient with people, Christians included, who blame God and the Church for everything which goes wrong. It seems to me that the world is waging a relentless war against God, and tragically, people who should know better are assisting in this war. But I ask you to look around. Does the escalation of violence, drug abuse, sexual abuse, pornography, and a general feeling of helplessness make you believe that peace, and truth, and hope are by-products of the world? Or is it rather that the much-maligned call of God through the gospel of Jesus Christ is the only effective answer? But you may say to me, "Even so, there is much that is good in the world." Well, of course there is, but it is only in so far as society has appreciated the love and compassion as revealed by God and manifested in His Christ that this is so. How can a world that is lost in sin produce qualities like that?

Therefore, let God be true. Let us determine not to exclude ourselves from His grace, but let us believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, confess Him before the world, be truly repentant of our sinful state, and be immersed in water into His name. Then the burden of sin will be lifted: then we shall know that God is really true, and that any man who tells us otherwise is a liar. Above all, never, never say that God or the Church excludes anyone. Let us put the blame for being out of fellowship with Him squarely where it lies. With ourselves!

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