

When I hear the word “exclusive,” I think of luxurious resorts, private golf courses, and posh parties. When searching for synonyms of “exclusive,” I am not surprised to see words like ritzy, swank, posh, fashionable, etc. But these words are not literal synonyms, they have become associated with “exclusive” through their use and have often given that word a desirable connotation. An exclusive country club is a place where only members can play golf. And to become a member is generally quite costly. The poor “riff-raff” who cannot afford the membership fees are excluded from playing. I might feel honored or fortunate to be invited to spend the day at an “exclusive club” like that. But, in real life, in everyday life, **I am considered riff-raff, not worthy of such privilege**, and excluded from the club. Exclusive really means “Excluding or tending to exclude, not allowing something else.”

Looking at the scriptures, especially the Hebrew Bible, there seems to be many examples of exclusion. Here are some references that paint a picture of **an exclusive club God has set up**. All of humanity, except for Noah and his family were excluded from living beyond the flood. (Gen6:7) All the descendants of Ham were excluded from God’s blessings. (Gen9:25) Ishmael was excluded from the covenant. (Gen17:20) Reuben, Simeon, and Levi were excluded from Jacob’s blessing. (Gen49:3-7) The Amalekites were excluded from life. (1Sam15:3) The Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hivites and the Jebusites were excluded from the land beyond the Jordan. (Exo23:24) Even the Israelites were excluded from coming near the Tabernacle during set-up and take-down. (Num1:51) Even the “sons of the kingdom” are excluded from the table of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. (Mat8:12) The man without wedding clothes is excluded from the wedding feast. (Mat22:12) There is a lot of exclusion that we read about. One might think that getting on God’s good side, gaining His favor, receiving His promises, are reserved for the few. In fact, that seems to be plainly declared two verses later in Mat22:

*"But when the king came in to look over the dinner guests, he saw a man there who was not dressed in wedding clothes, and he *said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without wedding clothes?' And the man was speechless. "Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' "**For many are called, but few are chosen.**" (Matthew 22:11-14)*

So, even Messiah admits, God’s Kingdom is an exclusive place.

"Surely all the men who have seen My glory and My signs which I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness, yet have put Me to the test these ten times and have not listened to My voice, shall by no means see the land which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who spurned Me see it. (Numbers 14:22-23)

This passage in Numbers is excluding people from the Promised Land. Many times, **if the conditions of God’s promises are not met, the promise is not honored**. This is the mechanism of a covenant.

*Now when Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty; **Walk before Me, and be blameless.**" I will establish My covenant between Me and you, And I will multiply you exceedingly." (Genesis 17:1-2)*

So, where is the inclusion? Who is included in life, in the promises, in the Kingdom? When God says “many are called, but few are chosen,” I don’t think He is telling us about what He does; He is not showing us that He chooses people. I think **He is telling us about our human condition.** “Few are chosen,” because few choose to turn back from their evil ways, few choose to love their neighbor as themselves, few choose to love God with all their heart, mind, soul, and strength. We can choose to be chosen. Knock and the door will be opened, ask and you will receive, seek and you will find... choose and you will be chosen.

The Assyrian empire was ruled by ruthless, violent people whose reputation for horrible atrocities was well known throughout the world at the time of Jonah. These people deserved to be excluded from anything godly. Yet, **God showed His mercy and spared them after they repented.** God included them in His mercy. They chose the narrow gate, they chose life.

When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it. (Jonah 3:10)

There are two prongs to this discussion. The first is regarding our inclusion into God’s plan. I think we all who are reading this somewhat know how that goes and what we need to do. The second prong is with respect to **the inclusion of others into God’s plan.** Again, I think we mostly understand what is needed. But I want to emphasize here that another’s inclusion is not a decision or judgement that I can make.

Maybe you have heard the line, “Kill them all and let God sort them out.” This is a gruesome mistranslation of a Latin phrase an army commander spoke to his troops during the Crusades in the year 1209. The original quote, while no less gruesome, was a direct reference to 2 Timothy 2:19 “...The Lord knows those who are His...” Given the many scriptures that hint at **God’s desire for complete and total inclusion in His plan,** and given the examples set by our Messiah, I feel that we should reword the quote yet again. Let us adopt the phrase, “Love them all and let God sort them out.”

"But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men. "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. (Luke 6:35-36)

In Luke 15:11 the story of the prodigal son begins. After leaving his family with the money and breaking all the rules, he came back home and was not excluded. Be merciful as the Father is merciful. I mentioned the “many scriptures that hint at God’s desire for inclusion.” Here is a partial list: Ezekiel 33:10-11, John 10:16, 2 Peter 3:9, Ezekiel 18:32, 1 Timothy 2:3-6, Ecclesiastes 12:13 and surely you can find others. There are also many great indirect references to this idea of complete inclusion **that Christ taught us through His examples.** Again, here is a list: The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25) Throw the First Stone (John 8:1) Prostitutes (Luke 7:36-50) Lepers (Mark 1:40) Tax Collectors (Mark 2:15-17) Children (Mark 10:13-15)

Exclusion is God’s job, not ours. Our job is inclusion. **Love them all and let God sort them out.**

Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. (Colossians 3:2)

Peace to you and glory to God!

-Nate

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