

Title: The Exclusivity of Christianity

Introduction

We live in a society in which **plurality, relativism, ecumenicalism** and **tolerance** is celebrated.

The world thinks there are **many ways** a person can be saved.

The world think that a **loving God would never send** anyone to Hell.

They think that those who declare that **there is only one** way to be saved and who stand upon the exclusive nature of Christ, the gospel and Christianity are **narrow minded, intolerant and even arrogant.**

The gospel of Jesus Christ is **unique and exclusive.**

It cannot be mixed or watered down.

If you **mix water with poison**, it becomes deadly, in the same way if you mix the gospel with error, or another belief system, it becomes deadly and loses its saving character.

If **every person was infected** with a **deadly virus** that is guaranteed will kill you, and there is **only one cure** that cannot be mixed or diluted and is freely available.

Surely you would want everyone to **use that one undiluted** or unmixed cure.

What if many labelled you narrow minded, intolerant, would you refrain from taking the cure?

What if many **present their own remedies** that don't heal, only pacifies you would you take it

What if some take **the cure and try to mix it with their remedies** would you take it?

These what if scenarios are taking place every single day.

- according to the world health organization,
- 153 424 people die each day
- 6392 people die each hour
- 106 people per minute
- About two people each second

The Bible says Rom 3:23, 6:23

And the majority are going to hell because they have not trusted in the gospel but in their own remedies, their own religions, their own works righteousness false systems of belief. Will you too become a part of that statistic?

18 For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 1 Corinthians 1:18 (ESV)

Historical Background

Mark was writing to believers who were persecuted by Nero. Worshipping of Caesar was the norm and the temptation to try and mix Christianity with Nero worship or other false religions would have been big, especially for those who came from that background.

Our passage today addresses the exclusivity of the Christ, the Gospel and Christianity

Propositional statement

The author provides 4 incompatible qualities of Christianity to other religious systems that oppose any idea of compromising or integrating with them.

1. The Incompatibleness between the religious practices
2. The Incompatibleness between the emotional responses
3. The Incompatibleness between the saving solutions
4. The Incompatibleness between the old and the new.

1. The incompatibleness between the religious practices

18 Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. And people came and said to him, "Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" Mark 2:18 (ESV)

18 Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting.

Mt 9:14-17 and Luke 5:33-39 record the same events in the other gospels.

- In Mathew the focus is upon the Disciples of John MT 9:14

14 Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" Matthew 9:14 (ESV)

- In Luke it centers on the Pharisees (Luk 5:33)

33 And they said to him, "The disciples of John fast often and offer prayers, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours eat and drink." Luke 5:33 (ESV)

- And Mark explains it as representatives of both groups.

The Disciples of John

- Some of Johns disciples had joined Jesus disciples (John 1:35-42
 - Andrew & John
- But others continued to followed John's teachings (Mt 6:29,11:2-3) and remained a distinct religious group. Acts 18:25,19:1-7
- They were in essence a renewal group and its not surprising that they adopted a more demanding code of religious practices that was followed by most Jews at the time.
 - The only required fast required by the law was the day of atonement. This was a day designated for cleansing from sins and afflictions of the soul(Lev 16,23:26-32)
 - But other fasts were added fasts after the exile.

Fasting: was expressions piety, self-consecration and expressions of mourning

- The disciples of John possibly were fasting because of the death of their master John.
Or likely as expression of repentance designed specifically to hasten the coming time of redemption. (Pre Messiah) This was in contrast to the Disciples of Jesus who were feasting with the Messiah among the sinners.

The Pharisees

- They pursued lives dedicated to the Torah, numbering +-6K and were about 1% of the population.
- They were extremely influential among the common people and surpassed the Sadducees, the Essenes and the Herodians
- They were described as the authorized successors to the Torah who sat at Moses's feet.

² ***"The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat, Matthew 23:2 (ESV)***

- The three main pillars of Judaism = prayer, almsgiving and fasting
- They developed many traditions called the traditions of the elders (Mr 7:5) which included: (Reason Many believed that the exile to Babylon happened due to disobedience to the Law, and therefore the pharisee intensified their efforts to keep the law and actually built hedges around the law called the traditions of the elders.)
- scrupulous adherence both to the written Torah and to the oral traditions based on it,
- coupled with expressed disdain for those who were ignorant, negligent, or violators of Torah. (Mrk 7)
- In Jesus day many followed these traditions, as a means for salvation and legalism became the norm.
- The Pharisees added fasts over and above the day of atonement fast.
 - Lamenting national tragedies (Destruction of the Temple)
 - Times of crisis, wars, droughts, famine
 - Self-imposed fasts for any number of personal reasons Example

¹² ***I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.' Luke 18:12 (ESV)***

They often fasted on Mondays and Tuesdays.

It was not a legal requirement in Jesus' day, but was seen as a prerequisite for religious commitment, a sign of atonement of sin, humiliation and penitence before God and an aid to prayer.

The Rabbis called it the affliction of the soul

And people came and said to him, “Why do John’s disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?”

ESV states “and people came” but the Gk simply stated “they came”

So, some representatives of both these groups came asking this question which insinuates that if Jesus and His followers are to be taken seriously, they had better pay greater attention to their fasting practices.

They were doing the Jewish practices, which showed their serious religious commitment towards God.

They were fasting but Jesus and His disciples were feasting with sinners (Mrk 2:13-17)

These practices were incompatible.

Mark draws his readers into asking the same question?

Why is there a difference between the religious practices of the Christ followers and that of the Jewish followers?

Part of the answer lies in what Mark had already taught 2:17:

Jesus came to save sinners and not call the religious(self righteous)

But Jesus does provide a corrective answer which brings us to the 2nd point.

2. The Incompatibleness between the emotional responses

¹⁹ And Jesus said to them, “Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast.

Jesus answer does not dismiss the practice of fasting.

Rather its a statement indicating that its not the appropriate time to fast.

Jesus poses a counter question to focus attention on the **new situation created** by His presence with His disciples.

“Can the Bridal guests **mourn during the bridal celebrations?**”

Jesus makes an **analogy with a wedding.**

The **wedding guest** (Gk sons of the wedding chamber)- **the grooms** men refers to the disciples of Christ.

The bride groom refers to Christ.

Entry into the kingdom of God is compared to a wedding feast in **several passages in** Scripture (Mt 22:1-14, 25:1-13, Rev 19:7-9)

Johns gospel uses **the imagery of the bridegroom** and his friend to express the joy at the **coming Christ.**

29 The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom’s voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete. John 3:29 (ESV)

Jewish weddings lasted 7 days for a virgin bride and 3 days for a remarried widow. Friends and guest **had no responsibilities but to enjoy the festivities.**

There was abundance food and wine, song and dance, fun both in the house and in the streets. Even Rabbis were expected to stop teaching the Torah and join the celebrations and the **quest were expected to eat.** The thought of fasting at such a moment was out of the question.

The Wedding feast suggest:

- New beginnings
- New relationships that are established
- New situation of **joy and exhilaration** at the presence of the bride and the bridegroom, but here its between the bridegroom and his men.

So, we see that Jesus himself is the **source of joy.**

11 You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore. Psalm

16:11 (ESV)

The Point Christ was making is this:

A wedding feast is a **time of joy** and therefore not a **time of sadness**.

To fast in the **presence of the bridegroom** would be **unthinkable**, so **fasting in the presence of Jesus with His followers would be unthinkable**.

So, we see the **incompatibility of the practice** and **the emotional responses** between the two groups.

The **religious were fasting**, a **sign of mourning**, without Christ

The disciples were **feasting a sign of joy**, the reason: **They were with Christ**

The **presence of Christ** makes all the difference.

Application: For you and I today:

The difference between Christianity and any other religion out there is the deep sense of **joy one experiences from Christ** despite trying and **difficult circumstances**.

Joy **characterizes the Christian** walk as a norm.

Example: Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God while their feet were in stocks in prison.

Oh my friends, **You will only mourn** for eternity if you **reject Christ and Christianity**,

I invite you even today, **Join the fellowship of feasting in** joy with Christ,

It may be hard now, **it may be difficult now**, but the wedding feast of the bride awaits the body of Christ, and His supernatural joy can be yours immediately.

Jesus came to bring gladness not sadness

Some Sources of joy for the believer: (If you want true joy, this is where you will find it)

- **Ps 16:11 His presence**

- 1 John 1:3-4 Fellowship with other believers
- Ps 19:8 The precepts of God's word rejoices the heart
- Rev 14:13 The happiness from being in Christ eternally
- 1 Thes 2:19 the expected future joy of believers in Christ presence for eternity

3. The Incompatibleness between the saving solutions

²⁰ The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day. Mark 2:19–20 (ESV)

In a normal wedding it is the guests who finally leave the groom and the bride to begin the life together.

But Jesus introduces an alien thought: the idea of the bridegroom being forcibly removed from the wedding celebrations.

Taken away= is contrasted with being with Him vs 19

The believers would not have understood this initially as a reference to Christ death and resurrection, but later as they reflected on this would have understood it to refer to his death and resurrection. (Fullfills)

⁸ By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? Isaiah 53:8 (ESV)

It would during this time that mourning and grief would be warranted.

Jesus told His disciples on the night prior to His death.

²⁰ Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy.

²¹ When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born

into the world. ²² **So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you. John 16:20–22 (ESV)**

Notice that **the world rejoiced** when **Christ was crucified**, while His followers were weeping.

But that was **temporal sadness**.

But when **Jesus rose from the dead**, the **sadness turned to joy**.

Jesus substitutionary sacrifice (death and resurrection) was central to His earthly ministry and was the foundation for forgiveness of sins and would lead to great joy believers experience.

The celebration that believers will experience in the heavenly wedding feast is only possible because the bridegroom was willing to die for His friends.

¹¹ I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. John 10:11 (ESV)

Jesus point is this

Judaism **at its most devout level** is exemplified by the **Scribes and Pharisees** which was **completely out of touch** with God's plan of salvation.

- They were **mourning** when they should have been **rejoicing** because they rejected **Christ as Saviour** and **clung to their own rules and regulations** to earn **salvation**.
- They were **consumed with self-righteousness**; He **preached divine grace**.
- They **denied they were sinners**; He preached **repentance from sin**.
- They were **proud of their religiosity**; He **preached humility**.
- They **embraced external ceremony** and tradition; He **preached a transformed heart**.
- They **loved the applause of men**; He **offered the approval** of God.
- They **had dead ritual**; He **offered a dynamic relationship**.
- They **promoted a system**; He **provided salvation**.

(Macarthur)

Salvation for them was based on **human achievement**, human works and deeds and regulations,

Salvation from Christ was based on **divine accomplishments**, Grace, what Christ **accomplished for them through** His death and resurrection.

This highlights the **incompatibility between the saving solutions**

Man **seeks salvation through** his **own efforts**

But God's **solution is based on Gods actions** not **human efforts**.

The most significant fact that highlights the incompatibility between Christianity and any other religion is how **they answer the question: How is a person saved.**

They would answer: **by some deed, some practice, some kind of human works**, legalistic practice.

Christianity would answer:

BY the **killing of the bridegroom**

- By **Christ death on the cross** for your sins
- BY his resurrection from the dead.

That is the **Gospel** and that is the **only way a person is saved**.

¹⁰ let it be known to all of you and to 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. ¹¹ This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. ¹² 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.” Acts 4:10–12 (ESV)

⁶ Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. John 14:6 (ESV)

Application

Let me give it to you this **morning as straight as I possibly** can

If you believe that you can be saved through

- Trusting in your own good works, your own efforts, any sort of religious deeds, practices or traditions, God guarantees that you will be spending eternity in Hell.
- If your trusting in the Roman Catholic system- which trust in the sacraments for salvation, you will spend eternity in Hell
- If you trust in the traditions of the elders like Judaism or African Tradition religion, you will spend eternity in Hell
- If you trust in any works righteousness religious system, Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, Confucianism, Jehovah witness, Christina science , hedonism, your own good works, any other religious system than Christ, and the gospel. you will spend eternity in Hell

But if you leave that behind and turn away from your system to the gospel of Christ, and trust in His death and resurrection only for the forgiveness of sins.

If you believe the facts, receive the Him as Lord and Saviour, entrust and commit your life totally to Him, He will save you, forgive you, adopt you into His family, into His Kingdom, into His body, which is the church and you will spend eternity with Christ . And in His presence is the fullness of joy.

4. The Incompatibleness between the old and the new.

21 No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the patch tears away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made. 22 And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins—and the wine is destroyed, and so are the skins. But new wine is for fresh wineskins.” Mark 2:21–22 (ESV)

Jesus uses two parable that together illustrate the uniqueness of Christ, the gospel and Christianity.

The gospel is totally incompatible with any false system based on work righteousness, or works salvation, including Judaism legalism.

1st Illustration

21 No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the patch tears away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made.

- Repairing an old tunic with a new piece of unshrinking fabric makes no sense.
- The coloring wont match and when its washed, it would shrink causing the garment to tear and ruining the garment.

The point is that the gospel of repentance and faith from sin could not be patched into the legalistic oral traditions of Pharisaic Judaism.

The true gospel cannot be successfully be attached to the tattered garments of superficial religion worn so proudly by the Scribes and Pharisees.

Judaism ceremonies were like dirty rags in God's eyes.

6 We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. Isaiah 64:6 (ESV)

It was beyond repair.

Jesus did not come with a message to patch up the old system.

The Jewish leaders had added their own rabbinic stipulations and traditions to God's laws so that many in Israel were keeping extra biblical prescriptions rather than honouring God's divine requirements.

The Rabbinical system had obscured the Law of God.

The coming of Christ fulfilled the requirements of the law and what the OT law, practices and shadows were pointing towards.

These were the OT signboards pointing to towards Christ and the Gospel
They become of obsolete with Christ present

17 "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. 18 For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. 19 Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but

whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 5:17–19 (ESV)

Jesus fulfilled the law and the prophecies:

- He fulfilled the moral law by keeping it perfectly
- He fulfilled the ceremonial law by being the embodiment of its types and symbols
- He fulfilled the judicial law by personifying God's perfect justice.

But Jesus did not fulfill the Rabbinical oral traditions, nor did He come to mend it.

The gospel of grace through faith in Him was not compatible with the works righteousness of Judaism.

The 2nd parable echoed the first point.

22 And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins—and the wine is destroyed, and so are the skins. But new wine is for fresh wineskins.” Mark 2:21–22 (ESV)

Just as an unshrunk cloth would destroy an old garment, so new wine in old wine skins would burst the wine skin and destroy the wine.

Wine was often stored in skins made out of goat.

The animal hide would be skinned by cutting only the legs and neck. The leg openings would be sealed shut and the neck would be used as a spout.

As new wine began to ferment, gasses would be released causing the skins to stretch.

Placing new wine into old wineskins, which had lost its elasticity would burst the wineskins resulting in the destruction of the wine.

As the new wine is incompatible with old wine skins, so the gospel is antithetical, opposes or is incompatible by any system of salvation by works

These parables illustrate the exclusivity of the Christian gospel and the tragic results when one tries to syncretize the truth with a false religious system.

Jesus teaches and explains that salvation, the gospel and true Christianity is not compatible with any work-based religion.

Jesus teaches that any attempt to try and combine **the two, mix the Two** or integrate the **two will lead to disastrous consequences**. (you would be embracing a false gospel) Your **worse of than keeping** the two distinct and separate.

The only true message of salvation is the gospel of Jesus Christ, that pardons sins by grace alone through faith in Hm.

Anything else is a false gospel and leads not to heaven but to hell.

⁶ I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— ⁷ not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. ⁸ But even 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. ⁹ As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. Galatians 1:6–9 (ESV)

Jesus came to introduce the new, not to patch up the old

Application

We live in an age where relativism reigns and compromise is valued.

We need reminding that the truth is exclusive and absolute.

Rather than trying to build bridges of artificial unity with false religions we should heed the words of Paul.

¹⁴ Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? ¹⁵ What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? ¹⁶ What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, “I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ¹⁷ Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says

the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, ¹⁸ and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty.” 2 Corinthians 6:14–18 (ESV)

Some think we should take the **best from each religion** and blend it with the best in the Christian faith and manufacture a **synthetic faith**.

All **paths do not lead to Rome**, rather all lead to Hell **only one leads to God** and salvation, based on **Divine accomplishment**(repentance and faith in Christ’s death and resurrection)and not based on human efforts.

But the Christian faith is **exclusive in character**.

- Don’t try to **blend Christianity** with any other religion.
- Don’t try to mix it, or try to incorporate it into Christianity.
- Don’t try to bring in the world’s **beliefs, the worlds values** into Christianity.
- Any attempt to try and **incorporate Roman Catholicism**, African traditional views, cults, Hinduism, any of these works-based systems into Christianity ends in a failure.
- Reject the following
 - Stop thinking that by **doing some kind of religious** practice that that will make you right with God or maintain your salvation(Christ accomplished all)
 - Stop trying to Christianise worldly philosophies, beliefs
 - Stop trying to **bring the world beliefs, practices and values** into Christianity
- **Just because everyone believes it, does it, thinks it, does not mean its true or in agreement with God and His Word.**
- Any time you think that **by doing some good work, some ritual**, you gain some **kind merit with God** for salvation or maintaining salvation, then you trusting in **works for salvation** which will leads to legalism.
- All you end up doing is creating a **false religion** which leads **all who trust in** it to Hell.

If you have been compromising, repent, give it up and pursue the exclusive one and only way of salvation which is through repentance and faith in Christ death and resurrection for your sins.

Its the straight and narrow exclusive way to Heaven.

Conclusion

The author provides 4 incompatible qualities of Christianity to other religious systems that oppose any idea of compromising or integrating with them.

1. The Incompatibleness between the religious practices
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Spurgeon wrote

Did you ever notice the intolerance of God's religion? . . . A thousand errors may live in peace with one another, but truth is the hammer that breaks them all in pieces. A hundred lying religions may sleep peaceably in one bed, but wherever the Christian religion goes as the truth, it is like a fire-brand, and it abideth nothing that is not more substantial than the wood, the hay, and the stubble of carnal error. All the gods of the heathen, and all other religions are born of hell, and therefore, being children of the same father, it would seem amiss that they should fall out, and chide, and fight; but the religion of Christ is a thing of God's—its pedigree is from on high, and, therefore, when once it is thrust into the midst of an ungodly and gainsaying generation, it hath neither peace, nor parley, nor treaty with them, for it is truth, and cannot afford to be yoked with error: it stands upon its own rights, and gives to error its due, declaring that it hath no salvation, but that in the truth, and in the truth alone, is salvation to be found. (Charles Spurgeon, "The Way of Salvation," sermon no. 209, preached August 15, 1858)