

THE UNIQUENESS OF JESUS: THE EXCLUSIVE WAY TO SALVATION

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

In the weeks that followed the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on New York and Washington many individuals turned to religious sources for comfort and strength. The whole nation watched the interfaith prayer service for America held at Yankee Stadium in New York City on September 23, 2001, as representatives of most of the world's major religious groups led in prayer or made statements that offered comfort and consolation. Many people were blessed by the act of solidarity and moved by the shared religious experience.

Similar gatherings were held throughout the United States in the days and weeks that followed. The *Baltimore Sun* reported that an assembly of people had met to pray under the banner of the Star of David, the Crescent Moon and "other symbols of world religion."¹ All across the United States there were comparable gatherings that took place to remember the first anniversary of the tragedy. These events demonstrate the growing religious pluralism that has been developing in western culture for several decades.

¹Diana Eck, "The Pluralism Project", Harvard University, 2004 [on-line]; accessed 23 July 2008; available from www.pluralism.org; Internet; John Rivera and Laura Vozzella, "Terrorism Strikes America," *The Baltimore Sun*, 12 September 2001, sec. A, pp. 16.

Throughout the history of humanity various people groups have followed various religious beliefs. As people interacted with each other, through commerce, war, or general human migration patterns, their religious beliefs have created conflict. In many situations, as assimilation takes place, there are continual conflicts, conversations, or an accepted position of religious pluralism. In many parts of the world, various world religions have been the dominant religious belief system. The religious cultural foundations of the United States were built on the principles of biblical Christianity. As the context of American culture has become more global in nature, more people, even inside the boundaries of evangelical Christianity, have rejected the particularist understanding of Christianity.² Ronald Nash points out in the preface of his book *Is Jesus the Only Savior?* that the “time Christians were identifiable by an unqualified commitment to Jesus Christ as the only savior of the world . . . has disappeared.”³ Cultural observers like Thom Rainer, George Barna, George Gallup and others have been reporting for years that Americans have become more “spiritual,” while at the same time drifting away from the spiritual foundations and religious heritage of biblical Christianity and embracing religious pluralism as their primary belief system.⁴

²Alister E. McGrath, “A Particularist View: A Post-Enlightenment Approach,” in *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*, ed. Dennis L. Okholm and Timothy R. Phillips (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 149.

³Ronald H. Nash, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 9.

⁴Thom S. Rainer, *The Unchurched Next Door* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 218. Other sources of interest include George Barna, *Grow Your Church from the Outside in* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2002); George Barna, *Boiling Point* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2001); Tom Clegg and Warren Bird, *Lost in America* (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 2001); George Gallup, Jr., *The Next American Spirituality* (Colorado

Evangelical Christianity proposes that the concept of exclusivism can be traced throughout the Bible. Although slightly concealed in the Old Testament, beginning in the book of Genesis with the call of Abraham, and becoming more evident in the New Testament, through the teachings of Jesus in the gospel of John, as well as in the history of the early church in the book of Acts, two truths can be learned. One, humanity is separated from God because of sin. God has provided an exclusive means to salvation in and through Jesus Christ. For an individual to have a saving relationship with God, he or she must have an exclusive faith in Jesus Christ as the sole provider of salvation. Two, God has called his people to communicate the exclusive message of salvation in Jesus Christ to a religiously pluralistic world of people who foster a variety of competing truth claims.⁵

Therefore, the goal of this section of this ministry project is two-fold. The first goal is to address the biblical and theological foundations of Christianity that are built on the belief that God has provided an exclusive way to salvation in Jesus Christ and that salvation is given when an individual puts his or her exclusive trust in Jesus Christ for the salvation that God has provided. The second goal of this chapter is to address the mandate God has given the church to evangelize the pluralistic culture around us with the exclusive gospel of Jesus Christ.

Springs: Cook Communications, 2000).

⁵Millard Erickson, *How Shall They Be Saved?* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 49-50.

**Gods's Covenant with Arbraham and the Call to
Communicate the Exclusive Gospel of Jesus
Christ to Religiously Pluralistic Peoples**

At the beginning of the patriarchal period God called Abram (Abraham) into a special covenant relationship. The call of Abraham initiates a radical new development that will ultimately heal the breach that sin has created between humanity and God. On three different occasions God promises Abraham that he would be the progenitor of a great nation and that all the nations of the earth would be blessed through him. The initial promise takes place in Genesis 12:3, and is restated in Genesis 18:18 and in Genesis 22:18.

At the time of God's call, Abraham's father and forefathers were polytheists.⁶ Every people group throughout the areas of the Middle East, Europe and North Africa maintained its own religious beliefs, creating pluralistic religious contexts within just about every known people group. It was out of this religiously pluralistic setting that God made a covenant with Abraham in order to begin his redemptive process with humanity.⁷

When God forged his covenant with Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3, it becomes quite clear that Abraham would be blessed by the relationship he would have with God. Along with God's promises to Abraham and his family came the promise that the rest of the world would also receive a blessing through the covenant. In the last phrase of verse

⁶Josh 24:2, "Long ago your ancestors, including Terah, the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the Euphrates River and worshiped other gods" (HCSB).

⁷William S. Lasor, David A. Hubbard, and Frederic W. Bush, *Old Testament Survey* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 45-50; Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 86.

3, God promises, “*All the peoples on the earth will be blessed through you.*”⁸ While some scholars debate the meaning of this statement, Joyce Baldwin suggests that the promise “anticipates the gospel of Jesus Christ.”⁹

Baldwin accepts the passive translation of the verb “will be blessed.” Other scholars, such as Claus Westermann, suggest that the verb is in the reflexive and should be translated, “bless themselves.”¹⁰ Kenneth Matthews agrees that the passive “probably suits” the passage best, since God is the source of the blessing.¹¹

The very nature of Abraham’s relationship with God was unique. First, it is clear that Abraham is placing his faith in only one God. It is out of a covenant of righteousness with Abraham that God renews his relationship with humanity as the one true God. Abraham takes a bold step away from the religious pluralism of his culture by placing his trust in God and his promises.¹²

⁸Unless otherwise stated, all Scripture in this project is quoted from the Holman Christian Standard Bible (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003).

⁹Joyce Baldwin, *The Message of Genesis 12-50* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 32.

¹⁰Claus Westermann, *Genesis: A Practical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 99.

¹¹Kenneth A. Matthews, *Genesis 11:27-50:26*, The New American Commentary, vol. 1B (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2005), 117. See also Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1-17*, The New International Commentary of the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 373-74; John H. Walton, *Genesis*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 392-93.

¹²Paul R. House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), 75-76.

Secondly, God establishes a missional opportunity to communicate the exclusiveness of his plan of salvation. Hence, Abraham's righteousness creates a conduit for God to eventually send the savior, Jesus Christ, who will be a blessing to the rest of humanity. Through this promise, God establishes the foundation for the missionary and evangelistic vision of the New Testament.¹³

The backdrop of God's promise in Genesis 12:3b, to "bless all the peoples on earth," through his covenant with Abraham, was foundational in Paul's letter to the Galatians.

Now the Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith and foretold the good news to Abraham, saying, 'All the nations will be blessed in you.' So those who have faith are blessed with Abraham, who had faith. The purpose was the blessing of Abraham would come to the Gentiles in Christ Jesus. (Gal 3:8-9, 14a)

Paul interpreted the Genesis statement in a far deeper sense than what traditional rabbinical exegesis allowed. Through Abraham's descendents the world would receive the scriptures and ethical monotheism. Paul went further by explaining that the real blessings offered through Abraham were the blessings of justification by an exclusive faith in the Messiah, Jesus Christ.¹⁴ Therefore, centuries before the coming of Christ, God "pre-preached the gospel" to Abraham preparing the way for his exclusively redemptive message to be proclaimed to the rest of humanity.¹⁵

¹³John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad!* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), 167.

¹⁴Timothy George, *Galatians*, The New American Commentary, vol. 30 (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994), 225; Herman N. Ridderbos, *The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia*, The New International Commentary on The New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 120-21.

¹⁵Leon Morris, *Galatians* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 101.

In Abraham we see that God intervened in the midst of a religiously pluralistic culture. God's redemptive plan began with the exclusive faith Abraham placed in God and the promises that were established in the covenant. Through Abraham's relationship with God, the example was set to engage a pluralistic world with the truth concerning the exclusivity of God in the definitive descendant of Abraham, Jesus Christ. It is by an exclusive faith in the promise of Jesus that humanity would receive the ultimate blessing of salvation.¹⁶

The theme of God blessing humanity through the messianic hope promised to Abraham can also be found in the Gospel of John. Throughout the gospel, John provides a narrative of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ that define his messianic mission. From the outset of the gospel, John builds his theology on the foundation of the Old Testament.¹⁷ While the next section of this chapter will deal with the gospel of John, it is important to see how exclusive promises of God to Abraham are fulfilled in John.

The promise of God's exclusive plan of salvation through the messiah is developed in John 8:56. In this passage, Jesus teaches that the patriarch Abraham "was overjoyed that he would see my day; he saw it and rejoiced." Rabbinical traditions have debated whether or not God had given Abraham a prophetic vision of the promised messiah. New Testament scholars have suggested that Jesus was referring to the messianic hope embraced by Abraham in verse 56.¹⁸ Certainly the promised "blessing for

¹⁶R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 185.

¹⁷Andreas J. Kostenberger, *John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 13.

¹⁸D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 357; Gary M. Burge, *John, The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 263.

all people,” in Genesis 12:3 would indicate that Abraham rejoiced about the messianic future, God’s exclusive plan for salvation, and the impact this message would have on the world.

Biblical Foundations for Communicating the Exclusive Message of Jesus Christ in the Gospel of John

Christians have cherished the Gospel of John throughout the ages. Many of its passages are used in evangelistic presentations. New Christians study it for the simple instructions it provides on the person and nature of Jesus Christ. Academicians write multivolume commentaries on its theology and content. Some of the most profound theology in the New Testament can be found in John’s writings. Throughout the ages people’s lives have been changed for eternity by sermons based on the message of the fourth gospel.¹⁹

John’s emphases on Christology has provided evangelists in every century the foundations for presenting the exclusive gospel of Jesus Christ to a pluralistic world that is in desperate need of the blessing of God’s plan for salvation. The message of John repeatedly declares that Jesus is the only way to salvation. Because of this fact, the Gospel of John has been at the epicenter of the exclusive-pluralistic-inclusivist debate.²⁰

As Christians evangelize the pluralistic culture of today, the Gospel of John provides a significant theological framework for presenting an exclusive gospel. From the

¹⁹Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 21; Kostenberger, *John*, 1; Gerald Borchert, *John 1-11*, The New American Commentary, vol. 25 A (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1996), 24.

²⁰Nash, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?*, 16, 84.

beginning the message of John focuses on the identity of Jesus as God the Son and the exclusivist redemptive purpose of his mission.²¹ The pluralistic nature of our culture leads people toward validating truth through personal experience. Throughout the gospel, John records how Jesus revealed his identity to helpless and hopeless individuals. John introduces some of the most memorable people found in the Bible.

One of the most familiar personalities described in the gospel is the religious leader, Nicodemus. Countless people have experienced an eternal transformation as they are engaged by the theological truths found in Jesus' dialogue with Nicodemus. The elementary precepts of God's exclusive work in Christ are found in this exchange.

At the beginning of the third chapter of John, we find Nicodemus coming to Jesus to inquire, "Who are you?" "Are you the messiah?" John records Jesus' surprising response to Nicodemus in John 3:3, "I assure you: unless someone is born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God." While Nicodemus is confused by this response, verse three provides the compelling truth that humanity must experience a dramatic spiritual transformation in order to see the Kingdom of God. Whatever Nicodemus' planned agenda was for his conversation with Jesus, he was unprepared for the response he received.²²

This concept of a new birth signified the radical change that must take place for someone to see the Kingdom of God. In the context of first-century Judaism, to see the Kingdom of God meant that an individual would share in the final consummation of

²¹D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 95.

²²F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 82.

the blessings of God's kingly rule. As a religious leader, Nicodemus would understand the statement in context of participating in the age to come, the resurrection of life. Therefore, seeing the Kingdom of God would be interchangeable with receiving eternal life.²³ Therefore, Jesus' response individualized the reality that without the regeneration of a spiritual new birth, it was impossible to receive eternal life.

In John 3:13-15, Jesus introduces Nicodemus to the truth that the only source for eternal life is belief in the crucified and resurrected Son of Man. There is a restrictive reality in verse 15, "So that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life." The exclusive statement, "in him," points to the only way for an individual to have eternal life. D. A. Carson points out that the verb 'to believe' is used as an absolute throughout John's writings as the condition or ground for eternal life.²⁴

In John 3:16 (NIV) one finds probably the most familiar passage in the Bible, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." The motivation behind God's exclusive provision of his son for the salvation of sinful humanity is love. Because of God's love for humanity, a way has been made for individuals to be saved. The restrictive stipulation for salvation is an exclusive belief in God's one and only Son. There are no other options and no other provisions for eternal life.²⁵

²³Ibid., 83.

²⁴Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 202.

²⁵Kostenberger, *John*, 129.

In verse 17, Jesus states, “For God did not send his Son into the world that he might condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.” While many have erroneously interpreted verses 16 and 17 as a foundation for Universalism and Inclusivism, Jesus’ message is clear in that a restrictive or exclusive belief in him was the only way in which one might be saved.²⁶ Jesus entered a world that was already lost and condemned. His mission was to save, not those who believe him, but those who would believe “in” him.²⁷ Just as God’s blessing of the promised hope would be introduced to the world through Abraham, in Genesis 12:3, the blessing of that hope is consummated in his plan of salvation through Jesus Christ.

In verse 18, there is a rudimentary statement for the exclusiveness of salvation in Jesus Christ, “But anyone who does not believe is already condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the one and only Son of God.” No longer is there a discussion of salvation in terms of the world. Instead, there is the distinguishing truth that each individual must accept Christ and believe in him. Many may argue that there are saving options of other belief systems as a means for salvation. However, the statement is clear; salvation is limited to only those who believe in the one and only way to salvation, Jesus Christ.²⁸

In the tenth chapter of the gospel, John continues to establish a biblical foundation for the exclusiveness of Jesus. In chapter 10:7 and 9-10, John records one of

²⁶Ibid., 128.

²⁷Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 711.

²⁸Nash, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?* 16.

the “I am” sayings of Jesus.²⁹ John also includes the second of Jesus’ double amen announcements.

While the major theme of this chapter focuses on Jesus as the good shepherd, it also introduces the concept that Jesus is the exclusive gate, or the door, to the safety and protection of salvation. The message of John 10:7 and 9 offer salvation through the exclusive gate of Jesus Christ,

Therefore, Jesus said again, I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep . . . I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. (NIV)

Much has been written about the “I am” statements of Jesus.³⁰ While interesting, further discussions will not be made here other than to point out that the use of the definite article with these statements supports the exclusiveness of Christ’s identity. When Jesus says, “I am the gate,” it is meant that there are no other gateways to salvation. Information gained in an electronic mail communication with John Polhill illuminates this fact. Polhill writes,

The use of the definite article would imply exclusiveness- particularly in the context of John’s Gospel. If John thought there were other ways or doors’ he would have left the nouns without articles, thus making an indefinite statement. The definite article must be considered in context, it makes the noun exclusive for the particular category it is addressing in the Gospel of John.³¹

²⁹The “I am” statements of Jesus in the Gospel of John are found in John 6:35,41,48,51; 8:12; 10:7,9,11,14; 14:6; 15:1,5.

³⁰Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 29 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 533-38.

³¹John Polhill, personal e-mails with author, 7-8 April 2005.

Therefore, the conclusion must be made that there are no other gates or doors that someone may pass through to receive salvation. It is only through the gateway of Jesus Christ that the way to salvation is opened.³²

In verse 9, there is an emphatic placement on the phrase “through me.” Again, as the future blessing of all people through Abraham, in Genesis 12:3, the exclusive means for salvation, in John 10:7 and 9, is through Jesus. The exclusive gateway provided through Jesus allows lost humanity the gate to the safe pastures of an abundant life for today (John 10:10b) and the hope of heaven for the future.

One of the most significant passages to support a restrictive or exclusive theology is found in John 14:6. The night before the crucifixion, Jesus began to prepare his disciples for his sacrificial death the next day. After encouraging the disciples not to lose heart, that God had amazing plans for their future (John 14:1-4), Jesus assures them with the words, “I am the way the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

In John 14:5 the disciple Thomas asks Jesus, “How can we know the way?” In verse 16, Jesus responds with yet another “I am” statement, as well as the definitive and exclusive reality that “no one” is able to come to God except through Jesus. He continues the restrictive triplet defining himself as absolute-objective-truth and the only exclusive giver of eternal life.

All three terms are extremely noteworthy to the overall meaning of the passage. However, the emphasis placed on “the way” is significantly the focal point of

³²Kostenberger, *John*, 302.

the verse. It answers Thomas' question that Jesus is the only way to the Father. The means to follow is through the truth of who Jesus is and the eternal life he provides.³³

As Jesus prepared for the events that would take place the following day, he understood that the road to his death would lead to life. Therefore, he was calling his followers to the same pathway. As the crucifixion would culminate with the resurrection, the followers of Jesus must also crucify their previous way of living in order to have a new and eternal life in Christ.³⁴

Jesus is the only way to God. People may follow the pathways of all other belief systems known to humanity, but they all lead to a dead end. The definite article is again used to underscore the point that there are no other ways to God. Jesus' pronoun is emphatic: "I [alone] am the way, the truth and the life."³⁵

Religious pluralists, like Reinhold Bernhardt, John Hick, and Thorwald Lorenzen, and Christian inclusivists, like John Sanders and Clark Pinnock, have strained to interpret the passage in numerous ways. Pluralists have attempted to relegate John 14:6 to be pertinent only to the historical context in which it was given, or state that John has rewritten the words of Jesus to suit his own theological bias. Others have tried to see the meaning of this passage through postmodern lenses by suggesting, "according to our

³³George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, The Word Bible Commentary, vol. 36 (Waco: Word, 1987), 252; Burge, *John*, 392.

³⁴See Gal 2:20 and 2 Cor 5:17. C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), 458.

³⁵Ray Summers, *Behold the Lamb* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1979), 180-81.

experience and according to our knowledge Jesus is the manifestation of the reality “God,” thus removing the objective truth that Jesus is the only way to salvation.”³⁶

Inclusivists struggle with John 14:6 as well. Sanders and Pinnock will agree that “Jesus is the only way,” but then meander through a convoluted maze of explanations that deny the exclusive reality of the verse. The inclusivist position argues that Jesus is the way to eternal life, but instead of an exclusive way, there is a swinging gate that opens up to salvation for all those who earnestly seek God no matter what the pathway of their belief systems might be. In other words, Jesus saves them whether they believe in him or not.

In summary, the Gospel of John communicates the message that Jesus Christ is God’s exclusive means for humanity to receive salvation. Furthermore, John reiterates that for an individual to receive salvation, he or she must have an exclusive belief in Jesus Christ. Some may attempt to find other meanings in John’s message that do not support this premise, and in doing so they have missed the exclusive message that was intended.

While there has been a brief discussion regarding religious pluralism and inclusivism in this section, the limitations of space prohibit further discussion here. The topic will again be briefly addressed during the section on Acts. There will also be a more in depth discussion in the theological segment of chapter 2.

³⁶Carson, *The Gagging of God*, 304-05; Nash, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?*, 84.

Biblical Foundations for Communicating the Exclusive Message of Jesus Christ in the Book of Acts

As the physician Luke set out to compile an historical narrative of the life of Jesus and the formation and growth of the early church it was his intent to write out the facts in an orderly and honorable sequence so that the followers of Jesus might have an accurate account of what took place.³⁷ For years Acts was seen as volume two of the history and was not perceived to be a theological work. Classical scholarship focused on the history of Acts and often ignored the rich theology of the book. Twentieth-century German theologians attempted to discredit the history of Acts and began focusing on theology. Finding Acts to be historically credible, more recent scholarship has embraced both the historical and the theological value of the book.³⁸

The contemporary context of our culture has been experiencing the growth of religious pluralism for several decades. As Christians engage religiously pluralistic people with an evangelistic apologetic, knowing that Acts provides a reliable history of the early church gives Christians a solid place to stand when defending the faith because it preserves the authority of Scripture. However, it is the intent of this ministry project to examine the rich theological truths that are established in the sermons and the historical events found in the Acts.

³⁷Luke 1:1-4.

³⁸Ajith Fernando, *Acts*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 21-26; Johannes Munck, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Anchor Bible Commentary, vol. 31 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967), xv; John Polhill, *Acts*, The New American Commentary, vol. 26 (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1992), 50-55.

One of the most exclusive texts found in the New Testament is Acts 4:12:

“There is salvation in no one else, for there is no name under heaven by which we must be saved.” The context of this passage is a religious court called the Sanhedrin. Peter and John had been involved in the healing of a lame man in chapter 3. The results of the healing had presented an opportunity for Peter to preach to the crowd that had assembled to witness the miracle of the lame man “walking and leaping and praising God.”

Peter had communicated to the crowd in Acts 3:16 that it was faith in the name of Jesus that made the lame man whole. Peter went on to explain the historical and the theological relevance of Jesus. In verse 25, Peter summed up the message by reminding the people that Jesus was the fulfillment of God’s promised blessing, given through Abraham, in Genesis 12:3.

In Acts 4: 4, Luke reports that five thousand men were saved through the event. However, verse 3 conveys that the religious leaders in Jerusalem arrested Peter and John as they heard the content of Peter’s message, saw the great crowd, and were concerned about the response to the message. As Peter and John stood before the court of inquiry the interrogation began with the question: “By what power or in what name have you done this?”

Peter’s response to the question addresses the miracle of the healing. He also gave an explanation for the miracle of the 5000 that had placed their faith in the only one that can heal the spiritual, emotional, and physical illnesses of humanity. The name that was used was like no other name; it was the name of Jesus. In the book of Acts there are thirty-two occurrences of the phrase, “in the name.” Ten of these phrases are used in Acts

2-4. The leaders of the early church emphasized the name of Jesus to bring clarity to the reality that salvation is found in no one else.³⁹

The words of Acts 4:12 offer a dramatic and emphatic apologetic that there is no other name but Jesus under heaven given to people to be saved. The statement is all encompassing; no other truth claims in Israel, or anywhere else, can bring salvation. F.F. Bruce states, “The once despised but now glorified Jesus, and from him alone, could true salvation come - not merely healing from a physical affliction, but healing from the spiritual disease of sin and deliverance from judgment as well.”⁴⁰

The two clauses that make up verse 12 offer a forcible case for proclaiming the exclusive message of Jesus Christ. The first clause states, “There is salvation in no one else.” If one accepts the authority of Scripture, then there is no other person other than Jesus that can be turned to for salvation. There are no other religious figures, other than Jesus, that provide a way for salvation.⁴¹

The second clause states, “There is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved.” Again, there are no other competing truth claims that are sufficient for salvation. Many interpreters of this passage overlook the use of the term “must.” The use of this term places emphasis on the individual need for people to be

³⁹Fernando, *Acts*, 165.

⁴⁰F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 100-01.

⁴¹R. Douglas Geivett and W. Gary Phillips, “A Particularist View: An Evidentialist Approach,” in *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*, ed. Dennis L. Okholm and Timothy R. Phillips (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 230-33.

saved. Without an exclusive relationship with Jesus Christ, all people are eternally doomed. Trusting in the name of Jesus fulfils God's redemptive plan of salvation through Jesus Christ.⁴²

The message of Acts 4:12 is a foundational proof text for Exclusivism. Yet, as emphatic as the message of Acts 4:12 is, there are some who still resist the exclusive message that is proclaimed. Pluralists, like John Hick, reject the notion that "there is no other name under heaven by which we must be saved." Hick questions the need for others to accept the salvation provided through Jesus Christ. Instead, he argues that the truth claims of the Hindu Upanishads, The Koran of Islam, or the philosophies of Buddha are as valid as those in the Bible and provide individuals transcendent divine reality that "God has many names."⁴³ In essence, Hick ignores the logical reality that truth claims that are diametrically contradicting each other cannot both be correct. Based on the authority of Scripture, "the way" and "the truth" is that "there is no other name under heaven by which we must be saved."

Inclusivists, like Sanders and Pinnock, struggle with Acts 4:12. The inclusivist position is that Acts 4:12, does, in fact, relate that salvation is provided exclusively through Jesus and that "no other name under heaven has been given by which we must be saved." However, they would go on to argue that Acts 4:12 does not explicitly insist that people must know the name of Jesus to be saved.⁴⁴ Their conclusion is mind-boggling.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³John Hick, *God Has Many Names* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982), 40-59.

⁴⁴Clark Pinnock, "Acts 4:12- No Other Name under Heaven," in *Through No*

The entire message of Acts points to the reality that an exclusive relationship with Jesus is essential for salvation and Acts 4:12 is the magnum opus of this truth.⁴⁵

The Anchor Bible translation of Acts 4:12 provides an interesting insight that should not be ignored. In Johannes Munck's edition of the commentary, the passage is translated, "And there is no salvation through anyone else. For there is no other name under heaven given to men through which we must be saved." In Joseph Fitzmeyer's edition the passage is translated, "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name in the whole world given to human beings through which we are saved." A theme that began in Genesis and continued through the Gospel of John and in Acts is the idea that humanity would receive God's blessing through the covenant established between God and Abraham. The culmination of the blessing is provided through God's one and only son, Jesus Christ. In Acts 4:12, the exclusive blessing of salvation offered to sinful individuals can only be received through Jesus Christ.⁴⁶

In Acts 10:1-11:18, the historical narrative that Luke provides points out that even the most sincerely religious individuals must have an exclusive relationship with Jesus Christ in order to be saved. The passages regarding Cornelius forms significant material that is important for both theology and evangelism and missions.

Fault of Their Own?, ed. William V. Crocket and James G. Sigountos (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 107-15.

⁴⁵Nash, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?*, 146-47, 172-74.

⁴⁶Ibid.; Munck, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 33; Joseph A. Fitzmeyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Anchor Bible Commentary, vol. 31 (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 294.

These passages also address the unhindered gospel of Jesus as it crosses over ethnic boundaries. The message found in these verses demonstrates the reality that the gospel had broken through the boundaries of religion as well. Acts 10:1-11:18 is important to this project for two reasons. First, as previously stated, these verses demonstrate that religious people have a need for an exclusive relationship with Jesus Christ in order for them to be saved. Second, this passage has been a focal point for those rejecting the exclusivity of the gospel.

In Acts 10:2-8, Cornelius is introduced as a centurion in the Roman military. There are other centurions mentioned in the New Testament who were spiritually sensitive and eventually placed their faith in Jesus Christ. Cornelius was a devout man. The Scripture reveals that he and his family feared God. During a time of prayer an angel tells him that his prayers have been heard and that God has accepted his good works. He is also informed that he needs to see the apostle Peter.

In first-century Judaism a “God-fearer” was a Gentile who adhered to the Jewish law, worshipped God, participated in the synagogue, did charitable works, but had not been circumcised (11:2-3). Therefore, he had not fully converted to Judaism. In the culture of first-century Israel, it was good for a gentile to be a “God-fearer.” However, “God-fearers” were still disenfranchised from associating with Jewish people and were still considered outsiders. Cornelius’ spiritual devotion prepared him for receiving the gospel of Jesus Christ.⁴⁷

⁴⁷Polhill, *Acts*, 252; Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, 214-16; Frank Stagg, *The Book of Acts* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1955), 115; James Montgomery Boice, *Acts* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 174.

After God had confronted Peter about the legal prohibitions of the Jewish traditions in verses 9-15, he responded to Cornelius' invitation to visit his home. In the first-century, it was an unprecedented move for a devout Jew to visit in the home of even a God-fearing gentile. The lesson here is found in the call to reach out to people of all nationalities and ethnic and religious backgrounds with the exclusive gospel of Jesus Christ. The record of Peter's visit in verses 34-43 tells how Cornelius, who was already receptive and spiritually sensitive to the movement of God, heard the exclusive message of Jesus Christ, believed and was saved.

The major debate proposed by those who reject exclusivist theology is whether or not Cornelius and his family were saved before Peter arrived and the gospel message was presented. Inclusivists, like John Sanders, postulate that because Cornelius was a God-fearer and his spiritual devotion was acceptable to God, he must have already been saved. Sanders rallies his position around Peter's words in verse 35, "In every nation the person who fears Him and does righteousness is acceptable to Him."⁴⁸

Clark Pinnock defines Cornelius as "the pagan saint par excellence of the New Testament." Pinnock astoundingly proposes that Cornelius was already saved and not "hell-bound" before Peter's arrival. Pinnock goes on to explain, "True, he needed to become a Christian to receive messianic salvation, including assurance and the Holy Spirit, but not to be saved from hell."⁴⁹ Pinnock's commentary raises the question, is he basing his theology on the Bible, or does he build it from Dante's *Divine Comedy*?

⁴⁸John Sanders, *No Other Name* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 222-23.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 260; Carson, *The Gagging of God*, 306.

The inclusivist position has missed several important points. First, in Acts 11:14, the message the angel gave Cornelius stated that Peter would come and “speak the words to you and all of your household will be saved.” The message was not to inform Cornelius that he and his family were already saved. The message that he would receive was the truth that was needed for them to be saved. If Peter had not gone to visit Cornelius to tell him of the exclusive message of Christ, Cornelius and his family would not have been saved (see Rom 10:14).⁵⁰

Secondly, Peter’s statement in verse 35 does not mean that Cornelius was already saved because he was a God-fearer. Instead, verse 35 should be understood that every individual, no matter who they are or where they come from, are acceptable to God in that his exclusive plan of salvation is available for all people. Verse 35 reemphasizes the fact that Cornelius had been prepared by God to be receptive to the exclusive salvation of Jesus Christ.⁵¹

Thirdly, as Peter concludes the message in verse 43, “All the prophets testify about him that through his name everyone who believes in Him will receive forgiveness of sin.” Therefore, without someone exclusively believing in Jesus there would not be the forgiveness of sin. Without the forgiveness of sin, an individual cannot be saved (see also Rom 3:23 and John 3:17-18).⁵²

⁵⁰Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad!*, 135.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Ibid.

Finally, in 11:17-18, the response of the church leadership in Jerusalem upon hearing Peter's report indicates that Cornelius' salvation had not taken place prior to Peter's visit. Verse 18 states, "So God has granted repentance resulting in life to even the Gentiles."⁵³ Therefore, it took Peter's visit to Cornelius' home for the exclusive message of Jesus Christ to be presented, resulting in the blessing that indicates the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham, "that all the nations would be blessed." The blessing Cornelius and his family received was the gift of salvation through the only way to salvation, an exclusive commitment to Jesus Christ.

The final passage to be explored in Acts is found in 17:16-34. In this passage the apostle Paul has traveled to Athens. In Athens he found a city that was a center for religion and philosophy. The polytheism of Athens was immediately noted by the abundance of temples and statuary that honored the numerous Greek gods. The Parthenon, the temple of Athena, was at the center of the Acropolis. Athens was also the bastion of Greek Philosophy. Socrates, Plato and Aristotle had all lived and taught there. Epicurean and Stoic philosophers met daily in the Areopagus, an open-air forum for philosophical debate that also provided a venue for formal judicial councils. Hence, the city of Athens was an excellent laboratory for the exclusive message of Jesus to engage a religiously and philosophically pluralistic culture.⁵⁴

⁵³Ibid., 136.

⁵⁴Fernando, *Acts*, 473; Polhill, *Acts*, 365-66; I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 282-83; John Stott, *The Message of Acts: the Spirit, the Church, and the World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 276-79; Carson, *The Gagging of God*, 496.

As Paul entered Athens he became troubled over the number of idols that were present. During his missionary journeys he had traveled throughout Greece and had been exposed to the pluralistic religious culture of the day. Athens' spiritual climate must have been much more disturbing than what he had encountered in other Greek cities. Though troubled, he acted with restraint and "reasoned" with the Jews in the synagogue, as was his custom. He then began dialoguing with various adherents of the philosophers Zeno and Epicurus in the marketplace. His message was not well received. In verse 18, the Epicureans and the Stoics called him a "seed-speaker," a babbler, and a pseudo-intellectual.⁵⁵ Others suggested that Paul was introducing "foreign deities" and in verse 20, "strange ideas." Four hundred years earlier Socrates was put to death over the same allegations.⁵⁶

In verse 19, Paul was taken to the Areopagus. Scholars debate whether Paul was taken to the forum to be charged in a formal hearing for his teachings. Others have argued that the event was less formal and was an intellectual exchange instead. The content of Paul's speech offers an excellent example for engaging a pluralistic culture made up of people who had never read the Old Testament and who were essentially biblically illiterate prior to being presented with the exclusive gospel of Jesus Christ.⁵⁷

Paul begins his message with courtesy and sensitivity. He connects with his audience on points that they could philosophically relate to. In verse 22, Paul affirms his

⁵⁵Polhill, *Acts*, 367; Marshall, *Acts*, 283-84.

⁵⁶Polhill, *Acts*, 367.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*

listeners for where they were spiritually. He affirms them for their religious zeal because they were a deeply religious people. In verse 23, Paul begins communicating in a way that they would understand. He establishes a philosophical point of reference by addressing the altar he had seen with the inscription, “To an unknown god.” Paul goes on to explain that what they worshiped, they did so in ignorance. The Epicureans and the Stoics did not embrace the traditional religious heritage of Athenian culture. They would agree with Paul’s view that the traditional polytheism was ridiculous and would be interested to hear the discourse that would follow.⁵⁸

In verses 24-31, Paul’s sermon offers a sterling example of biblical theology. For those who lack a biblical foundation, it is still important to present them with a theological apologetic that is founded on biblical truth as it confronts the personal views of the listener. While also utilizing an understanding of “natural theology,” Paul soon distances himself from the philosophical beliefs of his listeners. He does not want the audience to miss the point that God is not just in creation, but is the creator of the entire universe. He is not interested in placating them with what they want to hear. Instead, he is interested in telling them the truth in a way in which they will understand.⁵⁹

To the Athenians, God seemed unknowable. So, Paul’s message focused on the development of God’s special and exclusive revelation of Jesus Christ. He goes on to communicate the individual and exclusive need for human beings, as God’s children, to no longer worship God in the aloofness of material images, but through the personal

⁵⁸C.K. Barrett, *Acts*, The International Critical Commentary, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 835.

⁵⁹Carson, *The Gagging of God*, 499.

connection between God and humanity in Jesus Christ.⁶⁰ Paul concludes his message, in verses 30-31, with an appeal to repent and turn to the one God has appointed, the one who was raised from the dead, Jesus Christ. It is through the exclusive way of Jesus, the one who rose from the dead, that humanity can be connected with God.

By studying Paul's sermon in Athens, the contemporary church will discover an amazing template for communicating the exclusive gospel of Jesus Christ in a religiously pluralistic context. The result of Paul's message faced mixed reviews. In verses 32-34, it reveals that some scoffed, some were perplexed and thought further discussion was needed, and some believed. So it is in the twenty-first century. The message still must be presented in the hope that some might be saved.

Theological Discussions for Communicating the Exclusive Gospel of Jesus Christ with Religiously Pluralistic People

Since the later half of the twentieth-century the cultural context of the United States has become more and more pluralistic in religion and philosophy. In many ways pluralism has become the pervasive belief system of the day. The purpose of this section is to briefly provide a theological overview of Christian exclusivism as a response to religious pluralism and Christian inclusivism.

The church in America has witnessed the overt encroachment of religious pluralism in the overall belief systems of the nation, as well as the covert intrusion into the beliefs and practices within the church. However, if the terms "exclusivism," "pluralism," or "inclusivism" are mentioned in a local church setting one of two things

⁶⁰Ibid., 500-01.

will happen. First, many people do not have a clue what is being discussed. Second, many people misinterpret the meanings. To an average church member who comes from a conservative evangelical perspective it is theologically important to be an exclusivist, not a pluralist or an inclusivist. However, most church members want their church to be inclusive so that all people might feel welcomed. Further, the last thing people want is for his or her church to have a reputation of being exclusive where few are welcomed. At the same time people treasure the political and cultural pluralism of our national heritage, or what D.A. Carson defines as “cherished pluralism.”⁶¹ The brief overviews that follow will hopefully help define these terms for their proper theological meaning.

There has been a great deal written on the topics of this debate. D.A. Carson and Ronald Nash, as well as many others, have written extensive apologetics that define the theological foundations for exclusivism, while revealing the shortfalls of both religious pluralism and inclusivism. I appreciate the thoroughness and lucidness of their scholarship and I am deeply indebted to their work for this project in general and this section in particular.

What are Exclusivism, Pluralism, and Inclusivism?

Exclusivism is the theological position which teaches that the central claims of biblical Christianity are true. If other religious positions conflict with biblical

⁶¹Ibid., 18-19.

Christianity, those positions are false. Holding this perspective means that there are specific views of who Jesus is, what the Bible is, and how salvation takes place.⁶²

Exclusivism is the belief that Jesus Christ is the only savior and that exclusive faith in Jesus Christ is necessary for salvation.⁶³ The exclusive position denies that there are or ever can be other saviors. Exclusivism also believes that individuals must have a “conscious and explicit” faith in Jesus Christ in order to be saved.⁶⁴ Christian exclusivism is sometimes called restrictivism, or particularism.⁶⁵ Exclusivism is the pulse of historical Christian theology. Why would early Christians risk their lives to proclaim the message of the gospel without the belief that Jesus Christ was God’s only provision for salvation for sinful humanity?⁶⁶

The foundation of exclusivism is the authority of the Bible as the infallible and inerrant word of God. The Bible is God’s special revelation of truth to humanity. Exclusivism relies on the objective truth of the Scriptures, while pluralism, and even inclusivism, tends to approach truth in a subjective manner. Exclusivists understand that the Scriptures teach that humanity is separated from God because of sin. The Scripture

⁶²Ibid., 27.

⁶³Nash, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?*, 11.

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵Geivett and Phillips, “A Particularist View,” 19; John Sanders, Gabriel Fackre, and Ronald H. Nash, *What about Those Who Have Never Heard?* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 12.

⁶⁶Geivett and Phillips, “A Particularist View,” 19.

also teaches that every human being has a sin nature. God's provision for sin is the atoning work of Jesus Christ. Therefore, an exclusive faith in Jesus Christ is the only way to salvation.⁶⁷

Exclusivism believes that Jesus Christ is the incarnate Son of God. He is God's only son and is, in fact, God the Son. Therefore, for those who have put their faith in Jesus Christ, he is their justification, redemption, mediation, propitiation, and the resurrection and the life.⁶⁸ Jesus Christ is the exclusive hope for eternal life.

Exclusivism supports the belief that an "unevangelized mature person" will experience God's judgment and that those individuals who have not embraced a faith relationship with Jesus Christ will be eternally separated from God. The acceptance of salvation in Christ must be done before death. However, exclusivists may differ on the nature of hell.⁶⁹

Exclusivism does not hold that everything about other religions is wrong. Nor does it claim that all professing Christians are truly saved, or are correct about every doctrinal position they believe. If the teachings of other religions contradict the revealed truth of Jesus, then those teachings must be wrong. While the current culture may decry that exclusivism is bigoted, close-minded and self absorbed, the preservation of biblical Christianity and the exclusive gospel of Jesus Christ is imperative for the mission and future of the church.⁷⁰

⁶⁷Nash, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?*, 12-16.

⁶⁸Carson, *The Gagging of God*, 327.

⁶⁹Nash, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?*, 19.

⁷⁰Carson, *The Gagging of God*, 27.

In general, religious pluralism is not universalism. According to Timothy Beougher, universalism is the belief that all human beings will ultimately be saved.⁷¹ Religious pluralism is the belief that humans may be saved through a variety of various religions and saviors.⁷²

One of the most prominent pluralist scholars is John Hick. Hick states, “There is not merely one way but a plurality of ways of salvation . . . taking place in different ways within the contexts of all the great religious traditions.”⁷³ Hick loosely qualifies that not all religious systems meet the criteria of the “great religious traditions.” However, pluralists have not done well in identifying the criteria to distinguish the difference between authentic and inauthentic religious traditions.⁷⁴

Religious pluralism remarkably ignores that fact that two opposing truth claims cannot both be true. Pluralism relegates truth to a diluted point of subjectivity. Ignoring truth the pluralist concludes that, if one is an adherent to one of the world’s major religious movements everyone is heading for the same place. In his book *God Has Many Faces*, Hick suggests that the followers of the major religious traditions of the world are “like a company of people marching down a long valley, singing our own songs,

⁷¹Timothy K. Beougher, “Are All Doomed to Be Saved? The Rise of Modern Universalism,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 2, no.2 (Summer 1998): 6.

⁷²Nash, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?*, 22, 45-52.

⁷³John Hick, *Problems of Religious Pluralism* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1985), 34, quoted in Nash, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?*, 22.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*

developing over centuries our own slogans and stories, unaware of each other, yet moving in the same direction until we all meet together on the same plain.”⁷⁵

Many pluralists believe that religion is the human response to “the Ultimate”. Since they all produce saints, there must be an ultimate reality behind each religion. In his defense of religious pluralism Hick goes on to write:

Around the different ways of conceiving, experiencing and responding to the Real there has grown up various religious traditions of the world with their myths and symbols, their philosophies and theologies, their liturgies and arts, their ethics and lifestyles. Within all of them basically the same salvific process is taking place.⁷⁶

Hick further suggests that whatever name a religious belief system gives for God, we are speaking about the same deity and further suggests that the name of God should be called, “the Eternal One.”⁷⁷

In dealing with the authority of the Bible, Hick suggests that the Koran, the Upanishads, the Bhagavad-Gita, the Tao, or the writings and teachings of the other great religious traditions are on seemingly equal ground. To Hick, the Bible is simply a collection of documents and theology that is a human creation.⁷⁸ Hick condemns the

⁷⁵Hick, *God Has Many Names*, 41.

⁷⁶Carson, *The Gagging of God*, 27-28.

⁷⁷Hick, *God Has Many Names*, 42.

⁷⁸John Hick, “A Pluralist View,” in *Four Views of Salvation*, ed. Dennis L. Okholm and Timothy R. Phillips (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 33-36.

exclusive claims of Christianity as a “monopoly of saving truth.”⁷⁹ Furthermore, Hick denies the incarnation and maintains that the church gave Jesus the title, “Son of God.”⁸⁰

Hick represents a radical pluralism that attempts to undermine the fundamental evangelical concepts of the Christian faith. While many individuals in our culture have never read Hick’s works, their personal beliefs systems mirror what he has put into words. To offset the religiously pluralistic mindset that permeates twenty-first century culture, the evangelical world must boldly proclaim the exclusive message of Jesus Christ. The uncompromised teachings of the exclusive reality of Jesus Christ must be taught and learned by the church and lovingly but honestly communicated to the rest of the world.

While many individuals who have embraced a religiously pluralistic perspective thinking that it demonstrates an enlightened and intellectually sound position. The reality is quite the opposite. Religious pluralism is the abdication of intellectual standards. How can competing claims of religious truth, that are diametrically opposite of each other, be synergized and accepted as having the same level of truth? How can the polytheistic Hindu and the monotheistic Muslim have consensus that both are correct beliefs? How can a Buddhist who believes that there is no concept of the divine ever reconcile the Trinitarian beliefs of a Christian? Pluralism crucifies intellectual honesty for the sake of interfaith dialogue, political correctness, or pseudo-intellectualism at best, or intellectual slothfulness at worst.

⁷⁹Carson, *The Gagging of God*, 27.

⁸⁰Hick, *God Has Many Names*, 58-59.

Some “evangelicals” such as John Sanders and Clark Pinnock have responded to the pluralist position with the concept of inclusivism. Inclusivism teaches that no one can be saved apart from the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. However, they go on to teach that salvation encompasses all cultures. Therefore, an individual who, for example, is a devout Buddhist, will be saved by Jesus, even though he has never professed belief in him, nor has heard anything about him.⁸¹

Inclusivism rejects a conservative evangelical view of the authority of Scripture. It also dismisses traditional doctrinal position of the atonement. Inclusivists believe that general revelation is sufficient for salvation and rejects the exclusivist position, which insists that only through special revelation will people see their need for salvation. Most inclusivists deny the traditional doctrinal positions of hell and some even believe in post-mortem evangelism, where God gives lost individuals a second chance to believe after death.⁸²

John Sanders feels that “the gospel has a wider meaning than simply the good news about Jesus.” God has created a wider hope that some of those who never hear the gospel of Christ may receive salvation if they respond in faith to the revelation they have received.⁸³ Therefore, explicit knowledge of the historical work of Christ is not necessary

⁸¹Nash, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?*, 23; Dennis L. Okholm and Timothy R. Phillips, *Four Views of Salvation in a Pluralistic World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 15; Sanders, Fackre, and Nash, *What about Those Who Have Never Heard?*, 13.

⁸²Sanders, *No Other Name*, 177.

⁸³Sanders, Fackre, and Nash, *What about Those Who Have Never Heard?*, 215, 255; Sanders, *No Other Name*, 215; Nash, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?*, 118.

for salvation.

Like religious pluralism, inclusivism is a threat to evangelical Christianity. While it is politically correct, it is not biblical and denies many of the doctrinal positions of evangelical theology. Christians need to learn the Bible, understand correct doctrinal positions and build their worldview on biblical theology. For the church to effectively reach the religiously pluralistic world in which it ministers, these changes must take place.

In conclusion, as the apostle Peter summed up his speech before the Sanhedrin he closed his statement with these words: “Jesus is the only one who can save people. His name is the only power in the world that has been given to save people. We must be saved through him” (Acts 4:12 New Century Version). The message is an exclusive message. There is no one else for a sinful individual to turn to for salvation. Jesus Christ is the exclusive means for salvation and an exclusive trust in him is the only way for a person to be saved. These words summarized the message of Peter and were seen throughout the message of the early church. The same truth must become the message of the twenty-first century church as well.

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