

Response to C.S. Lewis on Inclusivism

I am an exclusivist: I believe all people, to be saved, must respond in faith to special revelation from God, specifically to Christ's gospel communicated through other people. A notable exception was the apostle Paul, but even he received special revelation from Christ himself [a resurrected person, though also divine and speaking straight from Heaven].

It troubles me to hear or read comments by universalists, who think all are saved regardless of response to Christ's gospel. It troubles me equally to hear or read comments by pluralists, who think there are ways to salvation other than through a faith response to Christ's gospel. My understanding of the beliefs of inclusivists – that Christ is the only bringer of salvation, but one need only trust in God's mercy, not respond to the gospel of Christ – seems on the surface less offensive: they do still at least keep Christ as the unique way of salvation, preserving his identity and work on the cross. However, they disregard scriptures teaching of the need to respond in faith to special revelation in Christ's gospel [Romans 10.13-17; Galatians 2.16; 2 Thessalonians 2.13; 2 Timothy 3.15; 1 Peter 1.8-9].

C.S. Lewis sounds inclusivist: “We need not conclude that He [Christ] cannot save those who have not explicitly accepted Him in this life” [*God in the Dock*, 102]. This keeps Christ as the only way of salvation, but disregards the need for a faith response to special revelation. Sometimes Lewis sounds even pluralistic: “We are not pronouncing all other religions to be totally false, but rather saying that in Christ whatever is true in all religions is consummated and perfected” [*God in the Dock*, 102]. This would seem to open up the door to alternative religions, alternative ways of salvation. I suspect Lewis meant this to be inclusivistic, in the sense that all religions reflect some spiritual awareness on the part of man, and thus some spiritual truth, and all truth is from God, so if these religions lead one to enough truth to seek mercy, then they can be saved. Even if this was Lewis' thinking, there is still a need for “enough truth” and, if we think our human reasoning emanating from sin-addled brains to be tainted [Romans 1.21-28; 6.20; 7.20; 2 Corinthians 4.4; Ephesians 4.18; Titus 1.15] such that we can never find God on our own, that truth must be special revelation from God.

As Pyne said in class videos for the DTS ST104 class, scripture requires a faith response to special revelation. Paul was as good a Jew as it was possible to be [Philippians 3.4-6], but he was forced by Christ into a faith response of special revelation [in this case directly from Heaven; Acts 9]. Even the biblical examples used by inclusivists to make their case, of people outside the covenant, all include special revelation to those characters. Nobody is saved through his own effort or through general revelation alone, though the latter calls out to us about God's existence and power. The biblical record shows God intervening to bring the gospel to people who needed to hear it for salvation despite their existing piety and faith in Yahweh [besides Paul, examples include the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8, Cornelius in Acts 10, and the disciples of John the Baptist in Acts 19].

God made one way out of our just condemnation, and all he asks of us is that we accept it in faith. Even if you theologically rely on God's sovereignty to save whom he will, the biblical record is clear that he does this through his Word and Spirit to bring about faith. Thus, I believe Lewis was in serious error when he made these statements.