

# God Includes, We Exclude

READING  
Acts 15  
Matthew 7  
Romans 1-2  
Matthew 13

*Do you know my son? Does he know you?*

In Acts 15 how they came together to discuss whether Gentiles (non Jews) who became Christians need to be circumcised. Petros gives a speech about how God accepted uncircumcised Gentiles when he first went to them “in the early days”. So if God accepts them, so should we. So why add rules on top of that? (He had originally gone to them after the spirit sent him a vision/dream three times about eating “unclean” animals. Specifically to wake him up to realise that Gentiles are saved too!)

Barnabas and Paulus told how they had seen miracles done among the Gentiles in other cities where they had been ministering.

Yaakov/James, (the leader in Jerusalem), makes the decision, (and they agree). The Gentiles should abstain from anything polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from food which has been strangled, and from blood. (So they had to start draining the blood from animals before they could eat them).  
It all sounds fair enough. Logical. No need for the whole Jewish Law, but just these bits should be enough.

This was one of the earliest cases of us making the rules about who is in and who is out. But whenever we do that, we’re always focused on who is out.

Who is not really a Christian?

God never had those rules.

But these guys used human logic and reason to come up with a way of deciding who they would accept, and have fellowship with, and who they would reject.

Instead of relying on the holy spirit to decide who is in and who is out, and getting on with serving our own lives, ... we have a tendency to want to be able to decide. So any trouble makers can be despatched and we can get on in peace with “real” Christianity.

But there is no measure that we can use. We can only judge the outside of a person. So whatever man made measurement we come up with... it will fail. Which is why it’s not about following certain rules and regulations, but about ... your faith, and whether you have it or not.

How about you? Do you have a way to decide for yourself who is and who isn’t a Christian?

Like: They have to say they’re Christian in a public place, and get baptised in water, and take communion. Do you have that kind of a rule? Or something similar?

Is your rule based on behaviour? And are there certain things that if they do those... they’re out an “obviously” not a Christian after all?

Can a homosexual be a Christian?

Can an adulterer?

A thief?

What about someone who thinks they’re better than everyone else?

God’s basic rule is... “Do you know my son?”

And kind of assumed in that, but sort of stated explicitly in Matthew 7... “Does he know you?”

In fact, in Romans 1-2, Paulus even seems to be implying that God’s rule is even more inclusive.

That we will have eternal life as long as we haven’t rejected something which God has revealed to us of himself.

If all we have ever been shown is that there is an amazing creation and there must be a creator God who made it all... and we accepted that and looked for him, and we respected and honoured him, ... Romans makes me think we’re OK.

But if we saw that and rejected that there is a creator. We rejected the idea of a god. ... we’re in trouble.

If we have heard of his son, and the sacrifice he became on our behalf to redeem us from the penalty of our sins... and we accepted that and put our life into his hands... it seems we’re OK.

But if we realised that but we rejected it... we’re in trouble.

Yahweh is much more about being inclusive than we are.

We focus on who is out. God focuses on who is in.

If he had been like us, he would have told Yeshua, “No need to go there. Stay here and we’ll have a wonderful eternity without them. They all deserve what they’re getting.”

Literally thank God that he isn’t like us. His love for us asked his son to sacrifice so that we would be in.

His son’s love for us compelled him to say yes.

Early in the second century a movement arose which became labelled “gnosticism”.

Led by Marcion, they were also labelled Marcionism.

They taught/believed that there was a creator who was the lesser vengeful god of the Old Testament. And that Yeshua was an emissary of the supreme god. And that Paulus was the only true apostle of Yeshua.

And if you know this, (and believe it), ... you’re in.

If you don’t believe it... you’re out.

Their in/out rule was all based on your knowledge and understanding of certain things. Hence “gnosticism”.

Marcion and his followers rejected the Old Testament, and many of the New Testament books, and of those they kept, they edited many parts. And thus they redefined Christianity to be something they could accept. The “true” Christianity.

The church of the time wasn’t too sure how to respond to this...

So, like they did in Acts 15, they got together with the leaders of the day and had a “council”.

By then there was a “bishop” of every major church, and these bishops all got together to discuss it.

To battle this over intellectualisation of Christianity, they came up with an intellectual definition of the Christian faith.

They made their own in/out rule based on intellectual knowledge and understanding of what Christianity was all about.

When different people started arguing about which of the books and letters were genuine, and which were not...

They had another council, of all the bishops from all the “important” churches.

And the council decided which books are in fact in, and which are out. And came up with a list of 27 which is what non-catholic churches today accept as the New Testament.

For every challenge, there was a council which defined, “once for all” what the correct answer was.

But they were missing the point.

The correct answer is, “Do you know my son? Does he know you?”

Only the holy spirit can know if you do. We cannot know the answer for certain of any other human.

And any rule we come up with to do that, will fail.

Remember in Matthew 13, Yeshua told the analogy of four farmers who sowed seed in different soils.

But in the second half, he told another analogy of a farmer who sowed quality seed, but weeds grew up among the good plants.

But instead of trying to rip out the weeds, and risk uprooting some good plants in the process. The farmer, (God), said to leave the weeds until the harvest, at which time they will be easily distinguished from the good plants, and they can be separated and burned.

Instead of our pre-occupation with weeds. With defining who is and isn’t a weed. Who should and shouldn’t be excluded from the church. In fact, often which churches are and aren’t actually Christian... and who we should and shouldn’t have fellowship with...

Let’s let them all grow together. Let’s let the holy spirit worry about how to control the weeds, and we just get on with being the best plant we can be.

And let’s look forward to the harvest.