

More Than Religion *by Marian Christopherson*

Setting: a neighbor's house

Characters: 2 neighbors sitting and visiting over coffee (a Christian and an unbeliever)

Neighbor 1: Hello, neighbor! Welcome!

Neighbor 2: Good morning! Thanks for inviting me over for coffee.

Neighbor 1: Did you go to church again this morning? Your family sure spends a lot of time there! Do you really believe all that Jesus stuff?

Neighbor 2: (*smiling*) We do go to church quite a bit. It's an important part of our lives.

Neighbor 1: There are lots of religions out there. I don't think it really matters what people believe, but good for you if it makes you happy. Religion is not for me.

Neighbor 2: I think there's a big difference between religion and Christianity. Religion is a system of beliefs and practices, but Christianity is more than religion. Christianity focuses on a personal relationship with the *ONE TRUE GOD*.

Neighbor 1: That sounds pretty exclusive! I think there are many ways to God—Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Mormonism . . . They all claim a path to God.

Neighbor 2: You're right that Christianity *is* exclusive, . . .

Neighbor 1: (*sharply*) One way to God? That seems *arrogant*! So my neighbor is an intolerant fanatic? A bigot?

Neighbor 2: (*laughing*) It might seem that way. But listen, Christianity is both the most exclusive and *inclusive* faith.

Neighbor 1: How can it be both? That doesn't make sense.

Neighbor 2: It's exclusive because Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6). Christianity centers on one person—Jesus Christ—as the *only* way to God.

Neighbor 1: That sure seems judgmental of everyone else. How can you make such a bold claim?

Neighbor 2: It's really not about what *I'm* claiming. The question is whether Jesus was telling the truth. Every religion and worldview make exclusive claims. If you say that all religions are equal, that's an exclusive claim, too, because it rejects religions that disagree. The real issue isn't whether a belief is exclusive; it's whether or not it's *true*.

Neighbor 1: I've never thought about it *that* way. But don't most religions teach basically the same thing—to be a good person?

Neighbor 2: Many religions share some moral teachings, but the core message of Christianity is very different. Most religions are a system of rules, with people trying to work their way to God. Christianity turns that upside down. Christianity is not about climbing a ladder to earn God's favor; it's about God coming down to save us because He loves us.

Neighbor 1: I suppose you think that all people are sinners.

Neighbor 2: Yes, including me! Christianity doesn't divide people into good and bad groups. It says we are all sinners who need God's mercy.

Neighbor 1: That's very different from what I've heard other people say about religion.

Neighbor 2: Christianity is not about what we do for God; it's about what He has done for us.

Neighbor 1: So how is Christianity *inclusive*?

Neighbor 2: That's the paradox. Christianity is exclusive because there is only one God and one Savior. But it's inclusive in that God desires all people to be saved. God loves all people, and Jesus died for the sins of the whole world. Anyone—no matter what race, background, gender, or status—can receive forgiveness and eternal life by trusting in Him.

Neighbor 1: Since you seem to have all the answers, here's another question: How can you know the Bible is true?

Neighbor 2: I definitely don't have all the answers, but that's a great question, and one I'd enjoy discussing! Let's talk again soon. I see you out walking a lot. Would you mind if I joined you sometime?

Neighbor 1: I walk Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 7 a.m. Is that too early for you? (*grinning, with a bit of sarcasm*) I wouldn't want to interfere with your morning prayer.

Neighbor 2: Wednesday at 7 works for me. I'll meet you in your driveway. I'd love to hear more about your family too!

Neighbor 1: Sounds good. See you Wednesday!

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