

Presidential Address : Identity, Exclusivity, and Inclusivity
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As a teenager, I read an intriguing article in a *Reader's Digest*-like magazine which argued that to teach our children to be generous, we must first instruct them to be selfish. In reality, what they really claimed was that some of things owned by the child should reserved for their exclusive use without having to share, with the remainder to be shareable. Doing this, it was argued, would enable generosity with the non-reserved portion. While I have difficulty labeling the concept of an exclusive reserved portion as selfish—making such a reservation was something God himself did in Eden— the original sales pitch is nonetheless catchy: One must be selfish in order to be generous. The paradox of this proposal is intriguing. A similar paradox seems to exist in Christianity, and is visible in the earliest records of the Christian Church, the New Testament. One side of the paradox is highlighted in the theme of the Evangelical Theological Society (ETS) for this year, "No Other Name." Because of the relationship of the Adventist Theological Society (ATS) to ETS it is our theme as well.

Ostensibly, "No Other Name" is a reference to Peter's statement in Acts 4:12 (ESV): "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." The message here seems clear and unambiguous. Peter asserts to the assembled Sanhedrin that Christ is the sole means of salvation appointed by God. Such a claim points to the exclusivity of Christ and a demarcation of communal

identity based on whether or not one believes in and confesses this exclusivity of Christ.

By contrast, the theme for the Adventist Society of Religious Studies (ASRS)—Gates and Walls: Inclusiveness and Exclusiveness and the People of God—directs us towards the opposite side of the paradox. A faith that preaches an exclusively defined way to salvation is called to reach every nation, kindred, tongue and people. In short our exclusive claims about Christ call us to be inclusive, inviting non-believers to enter our fellowship and become fellow believers. Is it possible that to be inclusive, we must first be exclusive?

Exclusivity and the Church

Let us return to Acts 4:12 where Peter makes this daring claim to the Sanhedrin. Peter clearly challenges the established Jewish order, charging that a Christless Judaism cannot save anyone. In short, Peter is making a very radical claim: there is no other way to salvation than Christ. Why is Peter's claim so important here?

Through the first 8-9 chapters of Acts Peter is the most prominent Church leader, and seems to act as the mouthpiece of the church. It is Peter who preaches the Pentecostal sermon in Acts 2 and calls the multitude to be baptized. Likewise, it is Peter who speaks to the lame man healed by the Beautiful Gate, and who addresses the people in the temple in response to that healing. Upon their detention by the temple police for proclaiming Christ in the temple, it is Peter who addresses the Sanhedrin in response, and it is in this address that Peter makes his claim concerning the exclusivity of Christ. Peter is the authority figure who confronts Ananias and Sapphira, and it is Peter who is asked to go to Samaria to check out the new body of believers (Acts 8), along with John. Even after the appearance of Paul, Peter

continues to be a prominent, if not dominant figure in Acts up into chapter 15. Hence, Peter appears to be one of the most prominent leaders in the early church, and in that role, he proclaimed Christ as the exclusive way given by God for attaining salvation.

In Acts 9, a new character appears in the church who would surpass Peter in leadership prominence, a man later known as Paul. Paul, in my estimation, shaped the formation of the early church in a manner similar to how Ellen White would shape the formation of the Adventist church. He is the most prolific author of our New Testament with 13 books (14 if you include Hebrews) and Pauline theology continues to incite debate across Christianity to this day, one example being the ongoing exchanges between N. T. Wright and John Piper. Despite his great prominence in the early church, Paul openly recognized the prominence of Peter as well.

Paul cast Peter in a pivotal role in Galatians, going out of his way to show that he and Peter were united in the meaning of the Gospel. Paul's first trip to Jerusalem after his conversion sees him visit only Peter and James. Only Peter and James are named in reference to his second visit, and then there is the confrontation with Peter as well (Gal 1-2). Paul describes Peter as the Apostle to the Jews, while describing himself as the Apostle to the Gentiles. Paul thus expresses his recognition of their co-prominence as leaders in the church. This co-prominence is further seen in Acts 15, where Peter, the apostle to the Jews, is the one who introduces the resolution that Gentiles need not be circumcised, and then is supported by Paul. Interestingly, Peter's speech is recorded verbatim, while Paul's is only summarized.¹

¹I suspect this was Luke's way emphasizing to the Judiazers that the decision of the council was not forced by Paul. By Peter making the initial motion, and by recording Peter's

The point, however, is that in Acts, it seems clear that Peter and Paul were the two most prominent apostolic leaders in the church. In harmony with Peter's statement to the Sanhedrin, Paul would make similar claims about the exclusivity of Christ, but in a much more developed way.

Paul highlights the exclusivity of Christ through use of the "in Christ" motif, especially in Colossians and Ephesians. As Andrew Lincoln notes, "the phrase has a great variety of force, which must be derived through the context in which it is found. Most frequently its use is instrumental, so that it means 'through Christ's agency.'"² For Paul, God created world "in [ἐν]Christ"³ and "through [διὰ] Christ" (Col 1:16).⁴ In like manner, Paul also argues that God's redemption is found "in Christ" (Rom 3:24), eternal life is "in Christ" (Rom 6:23), God was in Christ reconciling the world (2 Cor 5:19), God's love for us is "in Christ" (Rom

speech in detail while only summarizing Paul's comments, Luke is undermining the ability to the Judiazers to argue that the rejection of circumcision for Gentiles had no support from traditional, Jewish apostles.

²Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians, Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 42, eds. David Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1990), 21.

³I use the quotation marks to indicate a use of the "in Christ" motif. The actual Greek text may include pronouns like "in him" or other referents such as "in the beloved," but all are attestations of the "in Christ" motif.

⁴The parallelism of ἐν αὐτῷ (in him) with διὰ αὐτοῦ (through him) clearly shows that the motif here is instrumental. This is because instrumentality or agency is expressed with the Greek preposition διὰ (*dia*) combined with a noun or pronoun in the genitive case. In particular, this combination is used to depict secondary agency. Christ is the agent through whom God created the world. See James A. Brooks and Carlton L. Winbery, *Syntax of New Testament Greek* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1979), 25-26. For other examples of the instrumental use of ἐν, see, See Albrecht Oepke, "ἐν," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament [TDNT]*, Ed. Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 539-540.

8:1), we are sanctified "in Christ" (1 Cor 1:2), God's grace is given "in Christ" (1 Cor 1:4), we are justified "in Christ" (Gal 2:17), all will be resurrected "in Christ" (1 Cor 15:22), and God upholds the world "in Christ" (Col 1:16). Additionally, in Ephesians, we are told that God blesses us "in Christ" (Eph 1:3), chose us "in Christ" (1:4), has accepted us "in Christ" (1:6), redeems and forgives us "in Christ" (1:7), and is uniting all things "in Christ" (1:10). Using the parallel expression, "through [διὰ] Christ", Paul even asserts that God judges the world "through Christ" (Rom 2:6). Paul's message seems abundantly clear. All of God's actions toward this world—from creation to sustaining to blessing to saving to judging—ALL God's actions and interactions with the world are done through Christ as God's divine agent. This is why Paul asserts Christ is the exclusive mediator between God and man (1 Tim 2:5). Vincent Branick thus observes that Christ is "part of the ultimate agency of God" and "is God's instrument of justice and salvation."⁵ For Paul, Christ is the ONLY avenue through which God relates to this world. Hence there can be no other way of salvation or any other mediator.

Paul reinforces the exclusive role of Christ in one's salvation in Rom 10. Here, he urges that people are saved and justified by confessing with their lips and believing in their heart that Jesus rose from the dead (vs 9-10). "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (vs 13). Paul then asks the obvious question: How people call on Christ to be saved if they have not believed? And how can they believe, so they can call, so they can be saved (vs 14)? For Paul, standard Gospel procedure is that people must hear, so they can

⁵Vincent P. Branick, *Understanding Paul and His Letters* (New York: Paulist Press, 2009), xiv-xv.

believe, so they can call on the name of Christ to be saved. No other name will suffice, for Christ is the exclusive agent that God uses for all His dealings with this world. Christ alone is God's appointed way.

Paul, however does hint at a type of exception to standard operating procedure. In Rom 2, he speaks of "Gentiles" who are ignorant of God's law yet obey it as if written in the heart. These "doers of the law" will be justified, he asserts, but they will miss out on the assurance that comes with being righteous by faith. Their hearts accuse and excuse them (vss 13-16). I contend, though, that in Paul's mind, even these folk are still saved by Christ, God's only agent for relating to mankind.⁶ They just won't know it until the second coming.

It is interesting, then, that the two most prominent leaders of the early church both preached Christ as the exclusive agent of and means to salvation for mankind. Why, then, do they proclaim this common belief? I contend it is because their teaching came from the same source: Christ himself. Peter was an eyewitness to Christ's earthly ministry and teachings and Paul claims he received the Gospel without human agency through a revelation from Christ himself. Hence a basic unity on this matter is not surprising. We have an inspired memoir that records Christ's teaching activity during his earthly ministry, in part, in the Gospel of John.

⁶The scope of this paper precludes a full discussion of these issues. I would note, however, that in Acts 16:6, the "Holy Spirit" was directing the missionary work of Paul and Silas, forbidding them to go to Asia. This is paralleled by verse 7 where the "Spirit of Jesus" would not allow them to enter Bithynia. This sets up the directive from the Spirit to go to Macedonia. So even the work of the Holy Spirit in seeking lost souls is seen as tied to Jesus Christ, extending his work into the world. Hence, those exceptional cases suggested by Rom 2 are subject to the promptings of the "Spirit of Jesus," and surrender to do what this "law" requires.

Jesus and Exclusivity

Two statements of Christ, recorded by John, are suggestive of the exclusivity of Christ later proclaimed by Peter and Paul. The first is John 14:6 (ESV): "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." In the fourth gospel, this statement occurs during the last supper. Jesus has announced he is leaving and the disciples cannot come with him. The disciples panic, and Christ responds with the famous passage, "Let not your heart be troubled . . . I go to prepare a place . . . I will come again, " etc. (14:1-3). He then reminds them they know the way to where he is going (14:4). Thomas immediately challenges that they do not know where Christ is going and thus cannot know the way (14:5) . Jesus replies that he is the way, the ONLY way to the Father. Hence, the Father is the destination and Christ is the way to Him. The key point is in the simple, unambiguous phrase, "no one comes to the Father except through me." Like Paul would later, Christ presents himself as the only link between the Father and mankind. As Gail O'Day notes, "in Jesus, the incarnate Word, the Son of God, one can see and know God in a manner never before possible."⁷

The second passage recording Christ's teaching is in John 10. In this passage Jesus uses the imagery of doors and walls for a sheep-fold, thus connecting the respective themes of our two societies for tonight. Interestingly Christ casts himself both as the shepherd and as the door. Focusing on the latter, Gerald Borchert reminds us that,

⁷Gail R. O'day. "The Gospel of John." *The New Interpreter's Bible: General Articles and Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections for Each Book of the Bible*, vol. 9, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1995), 668.

The sheepfold was a place of security, not a place for intruders. Such a sheepfold would likely have been either a circular or square enclosure, probably constructed like a high stone fence or wall and perhaps topped with vines. The entrance would have been the only break in the wall, and once the sheep were safely inside at night, the watchman/guard (either a servant or a shepherd, usually an assistant) would lie down across the opening and serve both as the protector of the sheep and as a gate to the sheepfold. Unless an intruder was willing to confront the watchman, the only way into the sheepfold was to climb the wall (cf. 10:1).⁸

By contrast, as Borchert notes, "access for the shepherd was quite another matter. He could enter the sheepfold through the opening and check his sheep anytime he desired because he was known both to the watchman and to the sheep (10:2-3)."⁹

It is interesting that like the gate of an ancient city, the sheepfold door is not cast as a means of unfettered access and egress. Thus, gates or doors, like walls, were viewed as part of the security system protecting the city or the flock from outside dangers. Gates and doors did not represent unrestricted access, but are, rather, about regulated access that maintains a boundary. Hence, New Jerusalem has 12 gates yet we are told in Revelation 22:14-15 "Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates. Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood." Gates thus control access to provide safety. Gateways with no gate offer unrestricted access, undermining security.

⁸Gerald L. Borchert, *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, vol. 25a: John 1-11, ed. E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing, 1996), 331.

⁹Ibid.

Interestingly, in the sheepfold setting, it turns out that the shepherd could also act as the door to the fold. Merrill Tenney notes that "upon returning home with the flock, the shepherd stood at door and inspected each sheep entering. He anointed wounds, removed thorns, and gave drinks of water. When all the sheep were in, the shepherd would lay down across opening and become the door." Tenney concludes, "The emphatic singular pronoun "I" (*egō*) emphasizes that the shepherd is the sole determiner of who enters the fold and who is excluded. It parallels the later statement: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6)."¹⁰ J. H. Bernard agrees, saying, "In v. 7 the stress is laid on Jesus being the Door through which a lawful *shepherd* would enter. But here [v. 9] the thought is simpler. He is the Door through which the *sheep* must enter the fold, He is the door to the spiritual fold, as He is the Way (and the only way) of access to the Father (14:6; cf. Eph 2:18, Heb 10:20). . . . The saying *I am the Door* has always been quoted, from the first century onward, as having as wide an application as the parallel saying, *I am the Way*."¹¹ It should not surprise us, then, with Christ's claims to be the only means of legitimate access to God, that we find Peter and Paul, the two most prominent leaders of the

¹⁰Merrill C. Tenney. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 9, ed. Frank E. Gaebelain (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 108.

¹¹J. H. Bernard, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, *The International Critical Commentary*, vol. 28.2, ed. A. H. McNeile (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929), 354. Emphasis in original. See also, George R. Beasley-Murray, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 36, 2nd ed., eds. Bruce Metzger, David A. Hubbard, and Gikenn W. Barker (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 168: "The saying is parallel to 14:6, 'I am the Way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me.' Jesus is the door of life to the Kingdom of God, which is given to those who come to the Father through him."

early church proclaiming the same essential message. Christ alone gives us access to God.

Because Christ is the only door, and the only true shepherd, a sense of unique identity is established. Arthur Gossip notes, "In these verses [10:1-5] our Lord challenges the action, and indeed the authority in more than name, of those who had excommunicated the once-blind man; claims that he himself is the real shepherd of God's flock; and that it is those who recognize his voice and follow him who are the true heirs of the promises and the genuine people of God. . . . With confidence Jesus lays it down that those who are really his respond in certain ways. . . . A stranger they will not follow."¹² Those who follow the voice of Christ receive a unique identity. They are his sheep and not those of another shepherd . Only the sheep belonging to the right shepherd can enter a particular fold. Their identity is established through their relationship to the shepherd, and hence they form a defined, separate flock, following the voice of the exclusive, God-man shepherd who leads them. And yet it is this relational identity, separating the sheep of Christ from the surrounding flocks to Himself, that sets up the possibility of inclusiveness. Christ notes there are other sheep in other folds who need bringing in (John 10:16). And thus we have returned to our opening paradox. Why must we first be exclusive, in order to be inclusive? To see why, I shall make an analogy from Francis Beckwith's critique of moral relativism.

Beckwith's Paradox

Beckwith introduces his critique by stating, "Many people see moral relativism as

¹²Arthur W. Gossip, "Exposition of John," *The Interpreter's Bible*, ed. George Arthur Buttrick (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1952), 621.

necessary for promoting tolerance, non-judgmentalism, and inclusiveness, for they think if one believes one's moral position is correct and others' incorrect, one is close-minded and intolerant. I will argue . . . that relativism itself cannot live up to its own reputation, for it is promoted by its proponents as the only correct view on morality. This is why relativists typically do not tolerate nonrelativist views, judge those as mistaken, and maintain that relativism is exclusively right."¹³ For our purposes I shall focus mainly on his criticism of the relativist virtue of tolerance.

Beckwith starts by observing that "the principle of tolerance is considered one of the key virtues of relativism." Beckwith then unmasks a paradox: "the moral relativist embraces the view that one should not judge other cultures and individuals, for to do so would be intolerant. . . . Ironically, the call to tolerance by relativists presupposes the existence of at least one nonrelative, universal, and objective norm: tolerance."¹⁴ The fact that tolerance functions as an absolute moral value causes the relativist a problem. Thus, in another volume co-authored with Gregory Koukl, Beckwith levels the challenge that, "If there are no objective moral rules, however, there can be no rule that requires tolerance as a moral principle that applies equally to all."¹⁵ Beckwith summarizes his complaints in three points. "First, the relativist says that if you believe in objective moral truth you are *wrong*. Hence relativism is judgmental. Second, it follows from this that relativism is *excluding* your

¹³Francis J. Beckwith, *Defending Life: A Moral and Legal Case Against Abortion Choice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 3.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁵Francis J. Beckwith and Gregory Koukl. *Relativism: Feet Planted Firmly in Mid-Air* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998), 69.

beliefs from the realm of legitimate options. Thus relativism is exclusivist. And third, because relativism is exclusivist, all nonrelativists are automatically not members of the 'correct thinking' party. So relativism is partisan."¹⁶

Beckwith concludes that the moral relativist is thus confronted with a dilemma: "Judging someone as wrong makes one intolerant, yet one must first think another is wrong in order to be tolerant."¹⁷ Put another way, because relativism has an absolute moral standard—tolerance—while denying there are absolute moral standards, and because tolerance acts judgmentally and intolerantly, Beckwith charges that "*Ethical relativism is thus repudiated by itself*."¹⁸ In Shakespearian verbiage, the moral relativist ends up being hoist by his own petard, or, as expressed by Paul, "in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things" (Rom 2:1). This paradox, however, can work in reverse as well.

Beckwith explores the obverse side of the tolerance paradox by arguing that in order to be tolerant of others in moral debate, one must first be an absolutist. Arguing from a major dictionary definition of tolerance, Beckwith asserts, "tolerance, then involved permitting or allowing a conduct or point of view you think is wrong while respecting the person in the process. Notice that we cannot tolerate others unless we disagree with them. We don't tolerate people who share our views. Instead, tolerance is reserved for those we think are

¹⁶Beckwith, *Defending*, 13-14. Emphasis in original.

¹⁷Beckwith, *Relativism*, 149.

¹⁸Beckwith, *Defending*, 14. Emphasis in original.

wrong."¹⁹ In his other volume, Beckwith refines his point: Tolerance presupposes moral judgment of another's viewpoint. We cannot be tolerant of what we agree with as we have embraced it, but neither can we be tolerant of something that is of no interest to us (for Beckwith, one example is European professional soccer). The item of no interest we treat with "benign neglect", no caring one way or the other.²⁰ The problem, then is this. In order to be tolerant, I must first believe something is right or wrong but to believe something is right or wrong implies some kind of definite standard that reveals the rightness or wrongness of the issue in question. On the basis of Beckwith's observations, it seems that the moral relativist is, in reality, a closet moral absolutist, making moral judgments of others' views based on fixed standards of good and evil as defined by moral relativism. It thus seems impossible to avoid espousing fixed, absolute moral standards in some form or other, and hence the reversal is now complete. In order to be tolerant, one must first have clear, defined standards in order to know whom to tolerate. Relativism along with its moral norm of tolerance together become entrenched, fixed markers of identity, thus creating boundaries with which to determine who is included in the ranks of the faithful, and who is not.

In like manner, when a proposed moral norm like inclusiveness or tolerance becomes the litmus test of identity, such an issue becomes invested, not only with the absoluteness of a fixed standard, but also with a quasi-political nature that, like medieval church power, seeks to oppress or eliminate dissidents. A crusade mentality is easily inculcated, fostering a

¹⁹Beckwith, *Relativism*, 149.

²⁰Beckwith, *Defending*, 12.

fundamental exclusion of contradictory views, relegating them to inferior status. Therefore, for inclusiveness to achieve its stated purpose, there must be some other basis of identity which allows us to recognize who is not part of our "fold" so that we can reach out inclusively. The paradox, then, is that we must have a clear, exclusive identity based in something other than inclusiveness, in order to be inclusive. Further clarity about this paradox is brought through Christ's teaching about walls and gates in the sheepfold.

Christ says his sheep hear his voice and follow him. They will not follow the voice of a stranger. We cannot be inclusive until our identity is defined, not by a cause or crusade, but by a person—Jesus Christ. Only an identity centered in one's personal relationship with Christ can be properly inclusive, for, as we have seen, once inclusivity becomes a cause defining our identity, it becomes exclusive and intolerant. Responding positively to Christ's voice and following Him as one's shepherd become the two identifying marks of the sheep's identity in Jesus' teaching about the sheepfold. In regard to the second identity marker we must thus ask, where does Jesus go that the sheep follow?

First, the sheep follow Christ in dependence on the Father. Christ twice stated he did nothing of his own except as given by the Father (John 6 & 8). This is the same Jesus who rebutted Satan by declaring we are live by every word that comes from the mouth of God (Mat 4), and who frequently appealed to "it is written" as the governing basis of his choices and actions. Additionally, the sheep follow Jesus in *kenosis*, laying aside personal rights in sacrificial service to others (Phil 2:5-8; 1 Cor 9). They follow Jesus to the cross saying "not my will but thy will be done" (Luke 22:42). They follow Christ into the paradox of saving your life by losing it (Mat 16:25). They follow Christ to mount of blessing with it's

supercharged moral purity that probes far deeper than mere rule-compliance morality (Mat 5-7). And it is on this mountain that we find Godly inclusivity.

"But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:44-48).

The language of "enemies" shows a clear sense of identity in the sheep. They know who belongs to the fold, and who are enemies. It is this exclusive identity—being HIS sheep and no one else's--that calls us to model God's grace and reach out to those not in the fold and to woo them into fellowship with the shepherd, and thus into fellowship with the sheep. Paul is clear that Christ died for us while we were still enemies, undeserving of any divine favor (Rom 5:10). The woman caught in adultery exemplifies this principle. Based in her own qualifications, she had no hope of divine favor and was fully aware of her full deservedness of condemnation and judgment. Yet Jesus lifted the condemnation, calling her to a new life free of the sinful ways of the past. Thus, to snobbishly ignore or to scornfully reject interaction and fellowship with those differing from our "fold" is to subvert the work of the shepherd who goes out into the wilderness to find lost sheep and join them to the safety of the fold. Pious separatism from those differing from us undermines the example of the one who ate with pharisees, publicans, and prostitutes. Yet there must be a fold that determines identity so we can see whom to reach out to, yet with a door that provides both a protected

haven of safety from intruders and accessibility for the inclusion of more sheep.

Paradoxically, then, it is precisely our hopeless estate under divine judgment that prepares the way for God's grace. This is because Grace is undeserved favor, and undeservedness is established through divine judgement. God consigns all under sin (Gal 3:22) in order to bring grace to all (Titus 2:11). Commenting on the Old Testament influences on Paul's doctrine of salvation, Branick observes that, "Jewish faith held together the divine traits of live-giving love and deadly anger by a third personality trait, divine justice or righteousness. . . . This righteousness or justice often appears in the Bible in images of God as judge. In the prophetic tradition, God arises as judge against his people and against the nations to punish their sins where God is both witness, accuser, and judge in a forensic scenario." Branick adds, "The 'wrath' of God against his sinful people is a theme that dominates the writings of the prophets."²¹ And herein lies the paradox, for, as Branick testifies, "In the Jewish faith, only God can save from the wrath of God."²² Hence for Paul, Christ—in whom all the fullness of deity dwells bodily (Col 2:9)—saves us from God's wrath (Rom 1:18; 2:5; 5:9). Paradoxically, then, it is precisely our hopeless estate under divine judgment that prepares the way for Grace. Thus Paul notes he was a persecutor of the church, "unworthy to be called an apostle" but "by the Grace of God I am what I am" (1 Cor 15:9). It is when I recognize I am an enemy of God, under the just condemnation of the judgment, without hope, that I am ready to be surprised by God's grace. Receiving God's grace as a

²¹Branick, 64-65, 90.

²²Ibid., 90.

recovering enemy of God becomes the basis of my being gracious to others. The one who is forgiven much, loves much (Luke 7:47).

And such are the paradoxes of the Kingdom of God. God wounds that he may heal (Hos 6:1). If you try to save your life you will lose it, but if you lose your life for Christ and the Gospel, you save it (Mat 16:25). The first shall be last and the last shall be first (Mat 20:16). "Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave" (Matthew 20:26). "The greatest among you shall be your servant" (Mat 23:11). It should be no surprise, then that we need judgment to have grace and an exclusive identity in Christ to be inclusively gracious to others.

We return, now, to the opening paradox. To be generous with their toys, children need a reserved subset for their exclusive use, without having to share. Forcing them to share everything they own will engender the desire to share nothing. Having something exclusive provides the basis for being generous. May the paradox intrigue you as it has me, and may our identity in the exclusive shepherd, the God-man Jesus Christ lead us to demonstrate redemptive, gracious and respectful relationships with those outside our ideological folds.