



## [Isaiah 65:1-5](#)

(1) "I was sought by *those who* did not ask for Me;  
I was found by *those who* did not seek Me.  
I said, "Here I am, here I am,"  
To a nation *that* was not called by My name.  
(2) I have stretched out My hands all day long to a rebellious people,  
Who walk in a way *that is* not good,  
According to their own thoughts;  
(3) A people who provoke Me to anger continually to My face;  
Who sacrifice in gardens,  
And burn incense on altars of brick;  
(4) Who sit among the graves,  
And spend the night in the tombs;  
Who eat swine's flesh,  
And the broth of abominable things is *in* their vessels;  
(5) Who say, "Keep to yourself,  
Do not come near me,  
For I am holier than you!"  
These *are* smoke in My nostrils,  
A fire that burns all the day.

*New King James Version*

Our concern is His holier-than-you accusation. In this case, [God](#) is saying that Israel was rejecting Him, as if they were somehow better than He was and did not need the correction He had for them. Within a Christian assembly, a negative exclusivity can form in an individual and create hazards in our attitudes about ourselves and others, laying a spiritual minefield.

This attitude requires understanding. We must be careful. It causes some among us to be aloof within the group to their own hurt or to withdraw themselves and become

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independent. It infected the Jews of [Jesus](#)' day—in fact, the origin of the word "Pharisee" is vague, but most commentators believe it means "separatists." It affected the church, too, in the days of the apostles.

[Matthew 9:10-11](#) records an incident in which a form of it confronted Jesus:

And so it was, as Jesus sat at the table in the house, that behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to His disciples, "Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

Jesus' response pointedly reveals the error in their thinking and conduct.

[Galatians 2:11-13](#) exposes its existence in the early church:

But when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy.

This is a possible downside of the true church's exclusivity. It can produce a self-righteous, I'm-better-than-you hypocrisy if we forget or overlook the fact that it was God's work and not ours that provides our calling and spirituality. Even today, there are groups claiming to be the exclusive true church.

— John W. Ritenbaugh

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