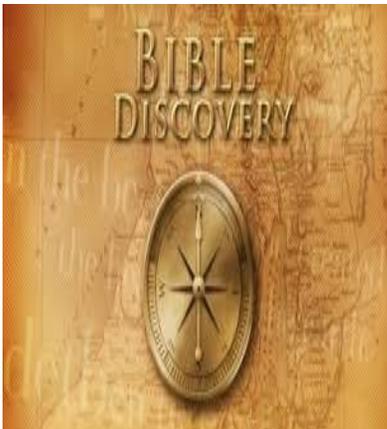


The Religion of Tolerance

Part 1 of 2



It's been said, "One of the main "religions" sweeping our world today isn't Christianity, nor is it Islam, Buddhism, Taoism, Mormonism or any other –ism other than perhaps secularism. Today the cry that echoes throughout the world is the religion of tolerance." It's used as the benchmark for assessing the attributes of leaders, to measure the acceptability of individual pursuit, and to explain actions against those who oppose the mass movement. Yet it's anything but tolerance that's used to stop those threatening their idea of acceptance. "Tolerance" today doesn't pertain to unlawful discrimination based upon race, gender, national origin, creed or religion; rather it's a persistent dogma bent on licensing society to live whatever lifestyle one chooses.

Words used to convey today's tolerance are presented as *broad-mindedness, open-mindedness, patience and lenience*. These terms imply such people are good people, loving and accepting of others. Since no one wants to be described as close-minded, narrow-minded, impatient, bigoted or unforgiving or classified as another "Archie Bunker" doesn't generally appeal to many it seems that everyone is marching to the tolerance banner. Though not condoning all that's happening in today's world, I don't believe we're called to be belligerent, rude or destructive in our approach to others. In fact, Jesus drew the sinners and outcasts to Himself because of His great love. Still, as Regina Franklin writes,

"We can't live fully for Jesus if we're too busy running for cover by trying to simply fit in. Rather than blending in to protect our well-being, let's follow Him and His principles, loving others and not requiring them to love us in return." Franklin goes on to suggest, "if by standing for Christ we stand out, may He be honoured and lives changed!"

The modern use of tolerance presents the idea real religion offers everyone the opportunity to experience their individual interpretation of life in the pursuit of happiness, the right to be themselves without the burden of bias, discrimination or societal condemnation. It's touted, or at least propagated, that lifting such barriers to personal development assures the betterment of all humankind. At least that's the party line we're told is today's great truth to be followed.

On the surface it seems to align with Paul's instruction to Timothy when he tells him, "*The goal of this command is love...*" [vs. 5]. But we must look to the full instruction of Paul if we would fully appreciate what this

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means. Where the concept, on first blush, appears positive with "Can't we all just get along?" – "You do your thing and I'll do mine" philosophies, the problem with such religion of tolerance is the boundaries become blurred and the standard is set on a slippery slope with everyone sliding to the same low level. Rules once applicable to everyone now apply to none of us. Wasn't that what we once called chaos? Into chaos comes control by the strongest powered by absolute strength to filled the void and overcome the vacuum.

Paul, in his letter to Corinth, was explicit about the eternal consequences of such immoral lifestyles. He was a very direct person who understood the status of those

who would stand before the Judgment Seat of God without the precious blood of Christ covering their sins. His character even today is much maligned because of his direct compassion for the souls of the lost. But Paul understood the cost! Sin separates us from God. Paul understood; he'd persecuted Christ's followers, he'd looked approvingly upon the stoning of Stephen, now considered himself to be the worst among sinners. We therefore can recognize that in his instruction to Timothy he could not deviate from his position to the Corinthians. Let's read verse 5 again – this time the whole verse... *"The goal of this command is love...which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith."*

It's more than "love" by whatever definition you might chose to proclaim it. God's command for love comes from **HIS** love to us, His sacrificial love given in His Son Jesus Christ that purified us from our sins and made us acceptable for relationship with our Heavenly Father for all eternity. As Paul reminds us, it's a love that upholds a good conscience and is pursued through a sincere faith. Why else would Paul then write of the *"law being good to expose the lawbreakers and rebels"*? Why would Paul speak of the *"ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious; those who kill their fathers or mothers, murderers, adulterers, and perverts; those who enslave others and profit from it – for liars and perjurers"*? Why else would our God give us *"sound doctrine that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God"*? Is not all this Paul's argument to us to live by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and pursue a life of righteousness through Him?

What should we do?

Shall we cloister ourselves away isolated from the world around us? Jesus was very concerned about the unrighteous or the sinner and desired each to come to the saving grace offered through Him. Last week we heard that when the Pharisees complained about Jesus eating with *"tax collectors and sinners"*, His fitting response was, *"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick"* then went on to instruct, *"go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."* [Ref: Matthew 9:11-13] Perhaps our conclusion is that in following Christ's teaching surely must foremost understand and be tolerant of others. Wasn't His message one of forgiveness and love, i.e. *"loving your neighbour as yourself"*? How can we bring condemnation to anyone today?

While acknowledging others have differing beliefs and accepting it's their right to do so, in our God given love for others, Christians must pursue all with love's deep desire that no one should perish but that all would have eternal life – and that's found only in Christ. The truth is salvation must be received freely from the heart of each one who hears – we can't force anyone into the kingdom. We're called to witness Christ in us and be ready to give an answer for the belief we carry in our hearts. Sadly, tolerance today has come to mean Christians must join with everyone in our society and embrace that all beliefs (other than Christ) – that even the lack of any belief is true and that is something we as Christians absolutely cannot do.

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The great question we must ask in the midst of this world religion of tolerance is what does God's love, rooted in the hearts of those saved by grace, compel us to do? Jesus said, *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"* [John 14:6]. And Peter tells us, *"It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved"* [Acts 4:10-12].

Though some may suggest there's no place for the exclusivity of such claims in our world today, as followers of Christ, as those who have received the Good News and experienced the **peace, joy, love and forgiveness** of our merciful Heavenly Father, we must remain firm in our faith as we walk with Christ our Lord; walking along the narrow path He has laid out for us – not out of pride or superiority – but in humility having received such great mercy, and through a commitment to reach out ready to wrap loving arms around all who

will receive our message of hope and find their salvation in Jesus Christ. We can only do such great work not of ourselves but through faith which itself comes from our gracious God.

Let us not become those who want to be teachers of the law yet do not know what they're talking about. To fall into the pit of such delusion not only causes our own condemnation but assures those we love we're of no help to them at all. Because we truly love, even as we're loved by Christ, we must persevere, enduring all suffering that may come our way, accepting that we're in the world yet not of the world and present a shining light of hope to our dying world that they too may discover the great love that comes only in Jesus as Lord and Saviour. We can only do God's work here on earth as He continuously "*conforms us to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which He has entrusted to (us)*".

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Blessings,

Pastor Dave