



TRUTH AND TOLERANCE

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(Jude 3, 4)



On the surface, the word "tolerance" appears as a benign manner of getting along with people who are different. "What's true for you is true for you. No problem." The seemingly innocent idea of tolerance has become the cardinal virtue, the sole absolute, of society. Children hear it preached every day in school and the media. Yet few people understand what society really means by tolerance, nor do they realize that it is the central doctrine of an entire cultural movement. As a result, few recognize the threat it poses to their children, their churches, and their faith.

ONE WORD, TWO MEANINGS

The traditional definition of tolerance means simply to recognize and respect others' beliefs and practices without necessarily agreeing or sympathizing with them. This attitude, that everyone has a right to their own opinion, is what tolerance means to most people.

But today's definition is vastly different. This new tolerance considers every individual's beliefs, values, lifestyle, and truth claims as equally valid. Not only do people have an equal right to their beliefs, but all beliefs are equal. The new tolerance goes beyond respecting a person's rights; it demands praise and endorsement of that person's beliefs, values, and lifestyle. This fundamental change in meaning—and thinking—represents one of the greatest shifts in history. And most people are missing it. This new tolerance has many alarming implications, and unless Christian churches, families, and educators recognize and respond to it, the new millennium is likely to be a dangerous time.

When presented with Jesus Christ and the historical evidence of His life and resurrection, people who opposed Christianity used to say, "Prove it!" and "I don't believe you." But there is a recent startling shift. Now, the opposition invariably says,

"How dare you say that?" or "Who do you think you are?" or "You are intolerant!" The issue is no longer the truth of the message, but the right to proclaim it. In the new cultural climate, any unpopular message can be labeled "intolerant" and therefore be repressed.

Because the new tolerance declares all beliefs equally valid, Christians will face increasing pressure to be silent about their convictions—in school, at work, and in the public square—because to speak out will be seen as an intolerant judgment of others' beliefs and lifestyles. Such pressure will pose severe problems not only for Christians, but for their families and children as well. The rise of the new tolerance is intolerant of anything that claims to be the one way, the only way. This makes the sharing of one's faith an increasingly dangerous proposition.

Christians may puzzle over why a crucifix, a Christian symbol, suspended in a jar of urine is considered art, yet displaying a homosexual symbol in a jar of urine would be decried as a hate crime. Society has shifted from a Judeo-Christian culture to an increasingly and aggressively anti-Judeo-Christian culture. As the new tolerance permeates today's culture, a new wave of unpopularity—and even persecu-

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tion—is likely to be encountered, not only by Christians, but also by observant Jews and possibly Muslims, because these faiths profess to be based on divine revelation as well.

Our own government has encouraged a public-private partnership to teach “tolerance” to middle school children. Funding for this tolerance campaign would come from both government and private industry under the guise of protecting our children against “hate crimes.”

WHAT DOES THE LORD REQUIRE?

It is not too late to avoid such scenarios, but doing so will require effort. Christians must humbly pursue truth. It may be difficult to speak the truth in today’s climate, but Jesus said, “The truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). Pursuing truth in this context means countering the new doctrines of tolerance. It means teaching children to embrace all people, but not all beliefs. It means showing them how to listen to and learn from all people without necessarily agreeing with them. It means helping them to courageously but humbly speak the truth, even if it makes them the object of scorn or hatred. Christians must always remember, however, that when the apostle Peter said, “Always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you,” he added, “with meekness and fear” (1 Pet. 3:15). The key is to aggressively live in love and humbly stand up for the truth.

Christians must also aggressively practice love. Everyone loves love, it seems, but few recognize how incompatible love is with the new tolerance. Tolerance simply avoids offending someone; Christians must help their children live in love, which actively seeks to promote the good of another person. Tolerance says, “You must approve of what I do.” Love responds, “I must do something harder; I will love you, even

when your behavior offends me.” Tolerance says, “You must agree with me.” Love responds, “I must do something harder; I will tell you the truth, because I am convinced that ‘the truth shall make you free.’” Tolerance says, “You must allow me to have my way.” Love responds, “I must do something harder; I will plead with you to follow the right way, because I believe you are worth the risk.”

The dreadful potential of the new tolerance can be averted, but only with a renewed commitment to truth, justice, and love. And, as it happens, that powerful trio of virtues can do more than prevent disaster—it can bring out true community and culture in the midst of diversity and disagreement.

FURTHER MEDITATION:

Other passages to study about the issue of tolerance include:

- Psalm 119:142–160
- Proverbs 2:1–6
- Matthew 5:7
- 1 Corinthians 8:13; 10:31
- 2 Timothy 3:16

To Learn More: Turn to the key passage note on tolerance at 2 Peter 2:12–22 on page 1672. See also the personality profile of Micaiah on page 470.

conduct of the wicked ⁸(for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented *his* righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing *their* lawless deeds)—⁹*then* the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment, ¹⁰and especially those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority. *They are* presumptuous, self-willed. They are not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries, ¹¹whereas angels, who are greater in power and might, do not bring a reviling accusation against them before the Lord.

DEPRAVITY OF FALSE TEACHERS

¹²But these, like natural brute beasts made to be caught and destroyed, speak evil of the things they do not understand, and will utterly perish in their own corruption, ¹³and will receive the wages of unrighteousness, as those who count it pleasure to carouse in the daytime. *They are* spots and blemishes, carousing in their own deceptions while they feast with you, ¹⁴having eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin, enticing unstable souls. *They have* a heart trained in covetous practices, and are accursed children. ¹⁵They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of

Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; ¹⁶but he was rebuked for his iniquity: a dumb donkey speaking with a man's voice restrained the madness of the prophet.

¹⁷These are wells without water, clouds^a carried by a tempest, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever.^b

DECEPTIONS OF FALSE TEACHERS

¹⁸For when they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through lewdness, the ones who have actually escaped^a from those who live in error. ¹⁹While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage. ²⁰For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. ²¹For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. ²²But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: "A dog returns to his

2:17 ^aNU-Text reads *and mists*. ^bNU-Text omits *forever*. 2:18 ^aNU-Text reads *are barely escaping*.

KEY PASSAGE



Tolerance

WHEN WE SHOULDN'T BE TOLERANT

(2:12-22)

Peter didn't leave much room for doubt about how he perceived false teachers. As these evil men infiltrated the churches, bringing with them their false teachings, wrong motives, and sinful lifestyles, they harmed many believers. They claimed to be followers of Christ, having heard the gospel message, but then they distorted that message. Peter wrote that "it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment" (2:21).

Peter did not say that believers should be tolerant and understanding of these false teachers. He did not say that the false teachers should be treated carefully and lovingly. Instead, he called them evil and commanded believers not to be deceived by them.

Overall, believers should be tolerant, accepting people from many different races and backgrounds. This is vital for the growth of the church. But we should not tolerate anyone who teaches what is opposed to God's Word.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about tolerance on pages 1694, 1695. See also the personality profile of Micaiah on page 470.

²⁰But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. ²¹Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work. ²²Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. ²³But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife. ²⁴And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, ²⁵in humility correcting those who are in opposi-

tion, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, ²⁶and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.

PERILOUS TIMES AND PERILOUS MEN

3 But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: ²For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, ³unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, ⁴traitors, headstrong, haughty,

SOUL NOTE



Run Away (2:22) Believers have a responsibility to be pure. No matter what a person's past, God will forgive. Once someone believes, the Holy Spirit enters their life to help them deal with the continual temptations of the sinful nature.

Some situations are more tempting for a person than others are, and in such cases the believer's best resource may simply be to flee. The "youthful lusts" here are not just sexual desires, although these are included. The area of temptation that causes us the most difficulty may be the one from which we simply must run. God is not dishonored when we flee temptation. He is dishonored when we give in. **Topic: Temptation**

SOUL NOTE



Never Give Up (2:25, 26) Paul was teaching Timothy how to deal with those in the church who oppose the truth. This teaching also applies to parents who are dealing with "opposing" children. Timothy was not to give up on contrary church members, and parents shouldn't give up on their contrary children—because they don't know "if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth." Parents pray and teach, hoping that their children will "come to their senses." We must entrust our rebellious children to God. **Topic: Adolescent Problems**

SOUL NOTE



Too Tolerant (3:1-9) There is a time for tolerance; there is also a time for intolerance. Being tolerant can be a positive characteristic when dealing with people's idiosyncrasies or weaknesses. Tolerance is also positive when it frees someone from prejudice toward a person's race or culture. But believers must not be tolerant of anyone who claims to teach the faith while living opposed to it ("having a form of godliness but denying its power"). "From such people turn away," exclaims Paul, for they cause great danger to weak believers. That's the kind of tolerance we don't need. **Topic: Tolerance**

³And the king of Israel said to his servants, "Do you know that Ramoth in Gilead is ours, but we hesitate to take it out of the hand of the king of Syria?" ⁴So he said to Jehoshaphat, "Will you go with me to fight at Ramoth Gilead?"

Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, "I am as you are, my people as your people, my horses as your horses." ⁵Also Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, "Please inquire for the word of the LORD today."

⁶Then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together, about four hundred men, and said to them, "Shall I go against Ramoth Gilead to fight, or shall I refrain?"

So they said, "Go up, for the Lord will deliver it into the hand of the king."

⁷And Jehoshaphat said, "Is there not still a prophet of the LORD here, that we may inquire of Him?"^a

⁸So the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "There is still one man, Micaiah the son of Imlah, by whom we may inquire of the LORD; but I hate him, because he does not prophesy good concerning me, but evil."

And Jehoshaphat said, "Let not the king say such things!"

⁹Then the king of Israel called an officer and said, "Bring Micaiah the son of Imlah quickly!"

¹⁰The king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, having put on their robes, sat each on his throne, at a threshing floor at the entrance of the gate of Samaria; and all the prophets prophesied before them. ¹¹Now Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah had made horns of iron for himself; and he said, "Thus says

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PERSONALITY PROFILE

MICAIAH: WHEN THE TRUTH IS NOT TOLERATED

(1 KINGS 22:8)

How valuable is the lone voice of truth amongst the clamor of lies! How brave is the one who speaks the truth when no one wants to hear it! Micaiah was a prophet who would not tolerate anything but the truth. Ahab was a king who could not tolerate the truth. When these two met, sparks flew.

Ahab, king of Israel, and Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, were forming an alliance to go to war against Syria. This was a bad idea in the first place—Ahab was an evil king who worshiped idols and surrounded himself with false prophets; Jehoshaphat had been a good king who led his nation back to God. So at their summit meeting, Jehoshaphat requested guidance from the Lord as to whether they should go to war. Ahab marched in 400 prophets who, not surprisingly, prophesied great success. Jehoshaphat felt a bit uneasy and asked for a true prophet of the Lord. Ahab knew of such a prophet, but hated him because "he does not prophesy good concerning me, but evil."

Micaiah was brought to the summit meeting. He played along at first, just to reveal the silliness of kings who seek prophecies to confirm what they want to hear. When pressed for the truth, however, Micaiah came through with a flourish, predicting defeat for the kings and death for Ahab should they go to war. Micaiah was outvoted 400 to 1, so the kings went to war, only to be defeated. Thinking he could outwit the prophecy, Ahab disguised himself. But God's word could not be thwarted, and Ahab was killed.

The mantra in today's culture is tolerance. People must tolerate anything and everything, except those who don't do the same. People love to hear what they want to hear, but find it hard to tolerate those who speak truth when it doesn't agree with them. Their refusal to listen doesn't make the truth any less true. In a world clamoring with lies, God needs people who are unafraid to speak the truth.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about tolerance on pages 1694, 1695. See also the key passage note at 2 Peter 2:12–22 on page 1672.

shall give his daughter to Benjamin as a wife."²Then the people came to the house of God,³ and remained there before God till evening. They lifted up their voices and wept bitterly,⁴ and said, "O LORD God of Israel, why has this come to pass in Israel, that today there should be one tribe *missing* in Israel?"

⁵So it was, on the next morning, that the people rose early and built an altar there, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings.⁶The children of Israel said, "Who *is there* among all the tribes of Israel who did not come up with the assembly to the LORD?" For they had made a great oath concerning anyone who had not come up to the LORD at Mizpah, saying, "He shall surely be put to death."⁷And the children of Israel grieved for Benjamin their brother, and said, "One tribe is cut off from Israel today. ⁸What shall we do for wives for those who remain, seeing we have sworn by the LORD that we will not give them our daughters as wives?"

⁹And they said, "What one *is there* from the tribes of Israel who did not come up to Mizpah to the LORD?" And, in fact, no one had come to the camp from Jabesh Gilead to the assembly.¹⁰For when the people were counted, indeed, not one of the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead *was there*.¹¹So the congregation sent out there twelve thousand of their most valiant men, and commanded them, saying, "Go and strike the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead with the edge of the sword, including the women and children."¹²And this *is the thing* that you shall do: You shall utterly destroy every male, and every woman who has known a man intimately."¹³So they found among the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead four hundred young virgins who had not known a man intimately; and they brought them to the camp at Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan.

¹⁴Then the whole congregation sent word to the children of Benjamin who *were* at the rock of Rimmon, and announced peace to them.

¹⁵So Benjamin came back at that time, and they gave them the women whom they had saved alive of the women of Jabesh Gilead; and yet they had not found enough for them.

¹⁶And the people grieved for Benjamin, because the LORD had made a void in the tribes of Israel.

¹⁷Then the elders of the congregation said, "What shall we do for wives for those who remain, since the women of Benjamin have been destroyed?"¹⁸And they said, "There *must be* an inheritance for the survivors of Benjamin, that a tribe *may not be* destroyed from Israel."¹⁹However, we cannot give them wives from our daughters, for the children of Israel have sworn an oath, saying, 'Cursed be the one who gives a wife to Benjamin.'²⁰Then they said, "In fact, *there is* a yearly feast of the LORD in Shiloh, which *is north of* Bethel, on the east side of the highway that goes up from Bethel to Shechem, and south of Lebonah."

²¹Therefore they instructed the children of Benjamin, saying, "Go, lie in wait in the vineyards,²² and watch; and just when the daughters of Shiloh come out to perform their dances, then come out from the vineyards, and every man catch a wife for himself from the daughters of Shiloh; then go to the land of Benjamin."²³Then it shall be, when their fathers or their brothers come to us to complain, that we will say to them, 'Be kind to them for our sakes, because we did not take a wife for any of them in the war; for *it is not as though* you have given the *women* to them at this

21:2 ^aOr Bethel



SOUL NOTE

Whatever Seems Right (21:25) The Israelites had no king and no commitment to God. Thus they did whatever seemed right in their own eyes. When people remove God from life, they are left with no guidelines other than what they think is right. Our culture today says we must be tolerant of everything—even blatant sin. Israel's tolerance of sin turned them away from God. Christians should be tolerant of different viewpoints, but should not condone beliefs or practices that would lead away from God's standards. We must be completely intolerant of sin and remove it from our lives. **Topic: Tolerance**