

The Sin of Tolerance

At home and abroad, the American people plead for broad-mindedness, tolerance and charity. Abroad, our ambassadors use all of their powers to influence warring parties to come to the conference table in a spirit of give-and-take. There is a sense in which the world needs broad-mindedness and tolerance.

However, in the realm of Christian experience there is a need for intolerance. In some things Christ was the most tolerant, broad-minded Man who ever lived, but in other things He was one of the most intolerant.

Tolerance Can Become Too Stretched

One of the pet words of this age is *tolerance*. It is a good word, but we have tried to stretch it over too great an area. We have applied it, too often, where it does not belong. The word *tolerant* means liberal and broad-minded. In one sense, it implies the compromise of one's convictions, a yielding of ground upon important issues.

We have become tolerant about divorce, the use of alcohol, delinquency, wickedness in high places, immorality, crime and godlessness. We have been sapped of conviction, drained of our beliefs and we are bereft of our faith.

The sciences, however, are narrow-minded. There is no room for careless broad-mindedness in the laboratory. Water boils at 212 degrees Fahrenheit at sea level; it is never 100 degrees nor 189 degrees, nor 211. Fresh water freezes at 32 degrees; it is never 23 degrees nor 31.

Mathematics is also narrow-minded. The sum of two plus two is four, never three-and-a-half. Geometry is narrow-minded. It says that a straight line is the shortest distance between two points on a plane. A compass is narrow-minded; it always points to the magnetic north. If it were broad-minded, ships at sea and planes in the air would be in danger.

If you should ask a man the directions to New York City and he said, "Oh, just take any road you wish, they all lead to New York," you would question both his sanity and his truthfulness. Nevertheless, we have somehow gotten it into our minds that "all roads lead to heaven."

But Jesus Christ, who journeyed from heaven to Earth and back to heaven again, who knew the way better than anyone who ever lived, said, "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Matt. 7:13-14).

Jesus Was Narrow About the Way of Salvation

Jesus plainly pointed out that there are two roads in life. One is broad, lacking in faith, convictions and morals. It is the easy, popular, careless way. Jesus said, "There are many who go in by it." But He pointed out that this road, heavily traveled though it is, leads to destruction. And in loving, compassionate intolerance, He says: "Enter by the narrow gate ... because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life."

His was the intolerance of a pilot who maneuvers his plane through the storm, realizing that a single error, just one flash of broad-mindedness, might bring disaster to all his passengers.

Once when we were flying from Korea to Japan, we ran through a rough snowstorm. When we arrived over the airport in Tokyo, the ceiling and visibility were almost zero. The pilot had to make an instrument landing. I sat up in the cockpit and watched him sweat it out as a man in the tower at the airport talked us in.

I did not want this man to be broad-minded. I wanted him to be narrow-minded. I knew that our lives depended on it. Just so,

when we come in for the landing in the great airport in heaven, I don't want any broad-mindedness. I want to come in on the beam, and even though I may be considered narrow here, I want to be sure of a safe landing there.

Christ was so intolerant of our lost estate that He left His lofty throne in the heavenlies, took on Himself the form of man, suffered at the hands of evil men and died on a cruel cross of shame to purchase our redemption. So serious was our plight that He could not look upon it lightly. He could not be broad-minded about a world held captive by its lusts.

Christ spoke of two roads, two kingdoms, two masters, two rewards and two eternities. And He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). We have the power to choose whom we will serve, but the alternative to choosing Christ brings certain destruction. The broad, easy, popular way leads to death and destruction. Only the way of the cross leads home.

Peter was reflecting Christ's teaching when he said, "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name [than Jesus Christ] under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12, brackets added).

The popular, tolerant attitude toward the gospel of Christ is like a person going to watch the Los Angeles Dodgers and the Atlanta Braves play a baseball game and rooting for both sides. Baseball fans are very intolerant. If you were to cheer for both sides in Los Angeles or in Atlanta, someone would yell, "Hey, you, make up your mind who you're rooting for."

Christ said, "You cannot serve God and mammon ... no one can serve two masters" (Matthew 6:24). We need more people who will step out and say unashamedly: "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15).

Jesus Was Intolerant Toward Hypocrisy

He pronounced more woes on the Pharisees than on any other sect because they were given to outward piety, but inside they were a sham. "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!" He said, "For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence" (Matt. 23:25).

A counterfeit Christian, single-handedly, can do more to retard the progress of the church than a dozen saints can do to forward it. That is why Jesus was so intolerant of sham! A great church leader said that the greatest need in the church today is for church members to live what they profess.

The hypocrite has nothing but the contempt of his or her neighbors and the judgment of God hereafter. That is why Jesus said, "Do not be like the hypocrites" (Matt. 6:16).

Jesus Was Intolerant Toward Selfishness

He said, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself" (Luke 9:34). Self-centeredness is the basic cause of much of our distress in life. Hypochondria, a mental disorder that is accompanied by melancholy and depression, is often caused by self-pity and self-centeredness.

Jesus was intolerant of selfishness. To the rich young ruler He said, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven" (Matt. 19:21). It wasn't the giving of his goods that Jesus demanded, but his release from selfishness and its devastating effects on his personality and life.

Jesus was intolerant of selfishness when He said, "For whoever desires to save his life shall lose it, and whoever loses his life for My sake will find it" (Matt. 16:25). The life that Jesus urges us to lose is the selfishness that lives within us, the old nature of sin that is in conflict with God. Peter, James and John left their nets, but Jesus did not object to nets as such; it was the selfish living they symbolized that

He wanted them to forsake. Matthew left the “custom seat,” a political job, to follow Christ. But Jesus did not object to a political career. It was the selfish quality of living that it represented that He wanted Matthew to forsake.

Jesus Was Intolerant Toward Sin

He was tolerant toward the sinner, but intolerant toward the evil that enslaves the sinner. To the adulteress He said, “Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more” (John 8:11). He forgave her because He loved her; but He condemned her sin because He loathed it with a holy hatred.

God has always been intolerant toward sin! His Word says: “Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil ...” (Is. 1:16).

“Awake to righteousness, and do not sin” (1 Cor. 15:34).

Christ was so intolerant toward sin that He died on the cross to free men and women from its power. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). Sin lies at the root of most of society’s difficulties today. Whatever separates a person from God disunites that person from others. The world’s problems will never be solved until the question of sin is settled.

The cross is God’s answer to sin. To all who will receive the blessed news of salvation through Christ, it crosses out—cancels forever—sin’s power.

Forest rangers know the value of the “burn-back” in fighting forest fires. To save an area from uncontrolled fire, they carefully burn away the trees and shrubs to create a safety barrier. When the forest fire reaches that burned-out spot, plants and animals standing inside the area protected by the burn-back are safe from the flames. Fire is thus fought by fire.

Calvary was a colossal fighting of fire by fire. Christ, taking on Himself all of our sins, allowed the fire of sin's judgment to fall upon Him. The area around the cross has become a place of refuge for all who would escape the judgment of sin. Take your place with Him at the cross; stand by the cross; yield your life to Him who redeemed you on the cross, and the fire of sin's judgment can never touch you.

God is intolerant toward sin. That intolerance sent His Son to die for us. He has said "that whoever believes in Him shall not perish." The clear implication is that those who refuse to believe in Him will be eternally lost. Come to Christ today, while His Spirit is speaking to your heart!

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