

WHEN TOLERANCE IS INTOLERABLE...

Dowlan Road, June 14, 2009 AM

INTRODUCTION:

- A. In a time when people in our culture have little concern with character, there is one quality that is prized more than any other: tolerance. It is a quality that is constantly praised. We are told that what is missing in our culture, what is needed more than anything, is more tolerance.
- B. It comes up in discussions about controversial moral issues.
 - 1. For example how many times in discussing homosexuality have you heard someone say that what we need is more tolerance? The Alameda County School Board recently adopted a new curriculum which will require elementary children to be taught about the homosexual lifestyle. They claim this is needed because kids need to be taught tolerance of homosexuals.
 - 2. You get a sense of what they have in mind when you consider what happened to Carrie Prejean (Ms. California) when she was questioned about same-sex marriage. Ms. Prejean was demonized for simply stating her personal belief that marriage ought to be between a man and a woman. Her words sparked a national scandal which threatened her crown. She was accused of being intolerant.
 - 3. This is interesting. The homosexual community believes it was intolerant for Ms. Prejean to suggest they were wrong, wrong to even voice her disagreement. However, it was not intolerant for them to suggest in some very unkind ways that she was wrong. This is one of the interesting things about the current view of tolerance – it's a one way street. You must be tolerant of me, but I do not have to be tolerant of you.
 - 4. To be blunt, in our culture those of us who hold to godly values are expected to keep our mouths shut, while those who want to promote and encourage any form of deviant behavior should be allowed to speak their minds.
 - 5. This is "tolerance" in our culture.
- C. Tolerance also finds its way into our discussions of religious issues.
 - 1. How often have you heard people say that what we need in our religious world is more tolerance? What they mean is that it would be wrong to suggest the beliefs or practices of another person are wrong. If you missed it, that statement is inherently contradictory!
 - 2. But this is nonetheless what many in our world believe. We ought to let people believe whatever they want to believe. We should never criticize the teaching or practice of another group. To do so would be...intolerant.
- D. Of course what matters to a true disciple is not how our world sees an issue, but what God says.
 - 1. When we look to the scriptures we find that our culture's view of tolerance is absolutely intolerable to God.
 - 2. This fact is plainly demonstrated in one of Jesus' letters to the seven churches addressed in Revelation.
 - a. This final book of the New Testament opens with seven personal messages to seven churches in Asia.
 - b. In the fourth letter – the letter to Thyatira – that speaks directly to our culture's confusion about tolerance.
 - c. Let's take a look at Jesus' message and what insights we can gain.

THE LETTER (Revelation 2:18-29)

- A. Although there were some things to be commended about this church (v. 19), they had a big problem (v. 20).
 - 1. Jezebel was probably not her literal name. Revelation is written in apocalyptic style and employs symbols and figures to communicate the message. Jezebel was a notorious, evil woman from the Old Testament, wife of the wicked king Ahab. Her name is applied to this woman because she is similarly evil.
 - 2. What's she up to? She says that she is a prophetess, perhaps claiming to have special insight and knowledge that others do not have. She is certainly not a true prophet. She teaches what is false and leads disciples in this church away from the Lord. Her influence has led some to become involved in immorality and idolatry. It was a terrible situation.
- B. But his complaint is not just against this evil woman (v. 20). The congregation was guilty of tolerating her.
 - 1. The word used here means "to let be" or "to leave alone." She was teaching this error and leading disciples astray and nothing had been done.
 - 2. Clearly Jesus expected them to do something. The Ephesians were commended because they had tested and exposed the evil men in their midst (2:2). This woman's teaching should have been tested. When found to be false, it should have been exposed. If she continued teaching error, she should have been removed from their midst so that others would not be led astray by her false teaching (1 Corinthians 5:6).
 - 3. Instead of taking action, this church had "let her be;" they left her alone. They were tolerant when they should have been intolerant.
- C. God's assessment of the situation is clear.
 - 1. He does not approve of this woman or the error she is teaching. Nor does He approve of this church's tolerance.
 - 2. She would be punished for her evil and suffer (vs. 22-23). Not only would she suffer, but also those who joined her.
 - 3. There is an important lesson here. Cultural may shout loudly that evil should be accepted. We may justify in our own minds our tolerance of evil. But God's standard remains unchanged. His righteous standard will be enforced and men will be held accountable.
- D. The point is simply this: In the case of this church, their tolerance was intolerable to God. We need to consider this story because of the powerful lessons we can take away.

THE LESSONS

- A. The Same Problem: The problem faced by this church is essentially the same problem we face in our culture, just on a bigger scale. Error is being taught. People are being told that evil is good; that wrong is right.
1. Our culture is filled with false teaching about morality.
 - a. We are facing great pressure to accept homosexuality as just another acceptable lifestyle choice. This is wrong (**I Corinthians 6:9-10**).
 - b. Many believe it is acceptable to have sex before you get married. Our culture would have us believe that this is just an unavoidable part of our growing up years. This is wrong (**I Corinthians 6:9-10**).
 - c. Almost half of all Americans believe it is acceptable to view explicit material on the internet or cable television and to have lustful thoughts. This is wrong (**Matthew 5:27-28**).
 - d. Many believe it acceptable to lie, especially if it will keep us out of trouble. This is wrong (**Colossians 3:9**).
 2. Our culture is also filled with religious error.
 - a. We face increasing pressure to accept all religious philosophies as equally legitimate. It doesn't matter whether you follow Buddha, Mohammad, Confucius or a head of lettuce. Everyone has their own path to God and no one way is superior to another. This is wrong (**John 14:6; Acts 4:12**).
 - b. Others would agree that Jesus is the only way, but would argue that a person can walk with Jesus down many different paths. They would argue that all "Christian" religions are equally legitimate. Believing in Jesus as the only way is the only thing that matters. They urge people to choose whatever church they would like to attend. They argue that doctrinal differences are really no big deal. This is wrong. God hates division (**John 17:20-23**). Just believing in Jesus is not enough (**Luke 6:46, Matthew 7:21-23**).
 - c. Right now in churches throughout this country, services will draw to a close and people will be told they can be saved from sin by faith alone – simply accept Jesus in your heart as your personal Savior. This is wrong (**Mark 16:16**).
 3. The point is there are a lot of things popularly taught and believed in our culture that are plainly wrong.
- B. The Same Danger: There is another danger to which we need to be sensitive.
1. Because so many have accepted wrong as right, there will be mounting pressure on us to be tolerant of these evils. We've seen how some have been maligned as intolerant for simply suggesting that marriage ought to be between a man and a woman. Some seek to label any condemnation of homosexuality as hate speech.
 2. Keep in mind that it is not really tolerance that is being sought. We are being pushed to accept evil, rather than stand against it.
 3. Have you ever considered how well this plays into the devil's hand? Think of the advantage he has when he persuades men to say that it is wrong to expose his lies for what they are.
 4. We face the same danger into which the church at Thyatira had fallen – the danger that our culture will push us to be more tolerant of evil.
- C. The Same Reality: Whatever men may say about evil, however society may compromise, God's standard has not changed. What He says about a matter is the truth.
1. Men may reject that standard now, but they only do it for a moment. Ultimately, all men will be held accountable to the words of God (**John 12:48-50**). It will make an eternal difference.
 2. We need to take our cue from another church addressed in Revelation (**2:2-3**). Although there were problems at Ephesus, they were dealing with error in the right way.
 - a. They tested for error. Every man and his message was measured by God's word. This is what determines truth, not survey of opinions.
 - b. They identified error (**2:2**). They called it what it was – false, evil. We should be willing to do the same. Some things are not just lifestyle choices or personal preferences. Some things are wrong!
 - c. They hated error (**2:6**). Notice that they did not hate the people, but their deeds. Religions and moral error will condemn men's souls. We need to hate it too.
 - d. They were intolerant of error (**2:2**). Understanding its consequences, how could any true disciple be tolerant of teaching and behavior that will cause men to lose their souls?
 3. As we face a world that is constantly moving further from the will of God, we need to take our stand with the Lord.
 - a. We need to be faithful not just to hold to God's standard, but to call our culture back to it.
 - b. We need to do this even if we suffer for it. This has been the lot of God's children throughout all time.
 - c. We need to be faithful to our calling!

CONCLUSION: THIS WORK IS VITAL!

The only way to be saved is to do the will of God (**Matthew 7:21**). Have you obeyed your God?