

# The New Tolerance



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*Thus says the Lord of hosts, "Do not listen to the words of the prophets who are prophesying to you. They are leading you into futility; they speak a vision of their own imagination, not from the mouth of the Lord." They keep saying to those who despise Me, 'The Lord has said, "You will have peace"' ; And as for everyone who walks in the stubbornness of his own heart, they say, 'Calamity will not come upon you.'*  
—Jeremiah 23:16-17

Are you a watcher? I mean do you pay attention to the times we live in? Are you aware of the shift in what is considered to be polite and impolite conversation culturally speaking? Let me zero in specifically on evangelism. Have you noticed the huge shift in the methods of presenting the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

I believe that many of the new approaches to evangelism are not well thought out and lack clear biblical support. The reason so many of these new emergent and hipster strategies are gaining a foothold in churches is because too many Christians have succumbed to new definitions of old words. Our society has determined that new definitions are needed in order to rationalize ungodly behavior. A case in point is the word tolerance.

In America tolerance once meant that everyone had a right to express their viewpoint and everyone had a right to disagree with a viewpoint. Today tolerance means that everyone has a

right to express a viewpoint as long as it is a socially acceptable viewpoint. In other words, if you hold a viewpoint that is contrary to what the society at large believes, you are not free to express yourself. If you are brave enough to try then you will be met with a very hostile “shout down” by the more enlightened people in our midst.

This has clear implications for telling other people about Jesus Christ. It has become increasingly impolite and in fact culturally incorrect to speak about anyone “needing” Jesus. The Christian faith is being systematically muted by self-appointed “elites” and apparently many Christians are ok with this development.

Tolerance used to mean defending the right of everyone to state their opinion in the public square of debate. Today tolerance has been redefined to mean that only opinions that are consistent with those ideals espoused by cultural elitists are permitted. Attempts are made to silence all contradictory viewpoints and some are silenced through the weapon of choice for these elitists – government activism. Here are some examples.

Army Lt. Colonel Christopher Downey is likely to be discharged after being administratively convicted of violating the military’s open policy concerning gays. What was Colonel Downey’s crime? He attempted to stop two lesbian Army officers from filming their erotic behavior that included kissing, groping, and disrobing each other while on the dance floor at an official Army officers dance and dinner event.

In another case in point, although certainly not surprising, California officials have once again passed irrational and convoluted legislation. The California legislature along with Governor Jerry Brown recently signed into law a bill that permits all public school children to self-identify their gender and based on that self-identification choose which restroom facilities they will use. This self-identification

even allows boys to participate on girls' sports teams and vice versa.

Perhaps the single issue that more than any other provides proof of the redefinition of tolerance is the culture war surrounding same-sex marriage. This is the most hotly contested issue of our day. But if cultural elitists have their way, all viewpoints that fall short of affirming and celebrating same-sex marriage will not only be silenced but criminalized.

Intolerance is now state sanctioned. Did that statement startle you? If so what I want you to do now is ask yourself why you are startled by that comment. Saying that intolerance, specifically intolerance toward Christians and Christianity is now a government mandated practice is easily proven from the abundant evidence all around us.

Examples are plentiful. For many years now, the federally funded National Endowment for the Arts has financially supported all expressions of art that serve no other purpose than to desecrate Christian symbols and sensitivities. Compared to other examples this now seems tame.

The US Government's continues to purge our military of chaplains who insist on praying in Jesus name while simultaneously increasing the number of Islamic imams and Wiccan leadership who denounce Jesus Christ; the suspension of teachers who attempt to teach creation or who dare speak of evolution as theory, and the now notoriously famous re-education of Christians who have refused to cow-tow to political correctness run amok and have stood instead on their convictions that certain behavior is sinful no matter how much government cover and celebratory nonsense it is shrouded in.

Of far more concern than our government's predictable behavior however, is the behavior of much of the Church. Pastor, author, and theologian John Stott succinctly describes the

present delusion of the church: "Tolerance is not a spiritual gift; it is the distinguishing mark of postmodernism; and sadly, it has permeated the very fiber of Christianity. Why is it that those who have no biblical convictions or theology to govern and direct their actions are tolerated and the standard or truth of God's Word rightly divided and applied is dismissed as extreme opinion or legalism?"

Some in the Church today have thrown in the towel and raised the white flag of surrender. They have decided that instead of standing firm on conviction and doctrine, it is far more expedient to agree with the latest cultural ideals.

Unfortunately, those who have given up the biblical position concerning marriage have succumbed to the siren song of postmodernism and have become blind to the consequences of their misguided expressions of love.

Christians who continue to hold to the teaching of the Scriptures concerning homosexual behavior should not be surprised at the rapid turn of events being played out in America today. The tares have certainly been growing among the wheat so that now in many denominations the tares have completely taken over and crowded out the wheat.

A recent "Relationships in America" survey supports this conclusion. Respondents were asked to give their views concerning a wide range of sexual activity including viewing pornography, premarital cohabitation, abortion rights, open sexual relationships, and the need for marital fidelity.

The survey's conclusion? Those confessing Christians who support same-sex marriage hold the same views as the general population. For instance, on the question of viewing pornography, Christians who support same sex marriage also support viewing pornography at a level slightly higher than the general population – 33% to 31%. On the subject of abortion, Christians who support same-sex marriage also

support abortion at a higher level 39% to 37%, than does the general population. Similar results are demonstrated across the board. This is not holiness friends, this is philosophical assimilation in the least and frankly unrighteousness unmasked.

What is the point in all of this? Christians who support same-sex marriage are not “cutting edge, compassionate, enlightened, right side of history” types. Rather, they are deceived and drinking the Kool-aide of the enemy who is stealing futures, killing congregations, and destroying their testimony of the God who forgives and saves from all sin.

## **Conclusion**

We started this conversation by observing that tolerance has been redefined to exclude the original idea of freedom of expression to the now sacrosanct notion of celebrating every behavior as normal and right. This new freedom does not include the freedom to disagree so it is really just freedom to walk in lock-step with the prevailing enlightened ideals of those opposed to historic, biblical Christianity.

What does this mean for Christian evangelism? It means that Christians need to sharpen their minds and focus on exactly what it is we are trying to speak to our neighbors and friends. Old techniques of evangelism don't work for the simple reason that people don't see anything “good” about the Gospel. For the most part all they hear are dos and don'ts. This leaves us needing to rethink our approach. In other words why is the gospel good news to those we want to speak to?

It is precisely at this point that the Gospel is most clearly seen as relevant to every culture, time, and place. You see, the problems mankind has wrestled with and sought answers to – namely where is hope to be found, can I find acceptance for who I am, who will love me truly and intimately, and even where can I find tolerance for my views – are all wrapped up

in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Hope is found in our new identity in Christ, an identity that He hand picks for each of us as His special creation. Acceptance is found in the unfathomable grace we experience as God accepts us in Christ and declares us holy and just in His eyes. Intimacy is found in the midst of an ongoing love that lifts us up in every circumstance. Finally, even tolerance as the present world defines it is turned upside down as Jesus Christ shows us how to love those different from us and yet remain faithful to proclaim the truth that Christ alone saves.

Friends, don't be dismayed by the current condition of the American culture. See instead great opportunity to share why the Gospel is great news for everyone. It truly is a transforming truth.

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