

Endnotes cont.

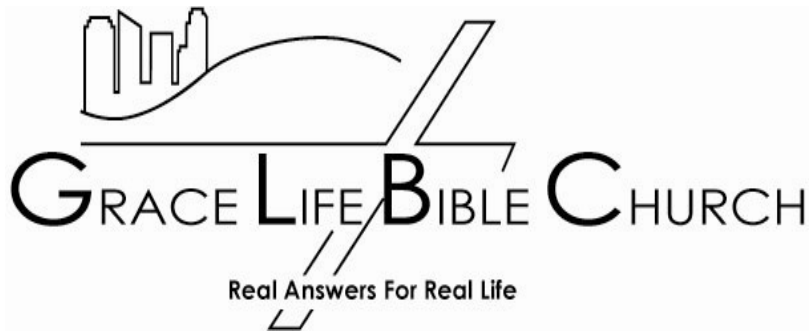
- 5) Ibid., 46.
- 6) David Horton. *The Portable Seminary*. 425-426.
- 7) Norman Geisler. *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 238.
- 8) Norman Geisler. *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*. 238.
- 9) Norman Geisler. *Systematic Theology Volume One*. (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2002), 132.
- 10) Geisler. *I Don't Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist*, 47.
- 11) Geisler. *Systematic Theology Volume One*, 132.
- 12) Ibid., 132.
- 13) Geisler. *I Don't Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist*, 48.
- 14) Ibid., 48.

For more information on the study of Apologetics from a Mid-Acts perspective be sure to check out Bryan's blog

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Feel free to participate in an interactive discussion devoted to this long overlooked topic within Grace circles.



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What Is Truth? Truth Verses Tolerance



**BY
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**IS CHRISTIANITY EXCLUSIVE?
ARE CHRISTIANS CLOSE-MINDED?
DISCOVER HOW OUR POSTMODERN
SOCIETY HAS REDEFINED WORDS.
LEARN HOW THE SUPPORTERS OF
THE NEW TOLERANCE ARE THE
MOST INTOLERANT PEOPLE MAKING
TRUTH CLAIMS IN THE PUBLIC
SQUARE.**

WHAT IS TRUTH? TRUTH VERSES TOLERANCE

Miss California's recent answer to a question regarding her personal views on same sex marriage has touched off a firestorm of discussion about tolerance in this country. Perez Hilton, and his supporters, have charged Miss California, and all those who share her views regarding marriage with being intolerant. Is it not ironic that those who scream the loudest in the public square about being tolerant are selective in their application of the term? Hilton preaches tolerance with respect to his lifestyle while he demonizes Miss California for not agreeing with him. Who is really being intolerant? Herein lies the dirty little secret of those who advocate for the new tolerance. They are only tolerant as long as one agrees with them; thus, they are hardly tolerant at all.

Norman L. Geisler and Frank Turek address the redefining of tolerance in our post-modern culture in their book *I Don't Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist*. They write, "Tolerance, no longer means to put up with something you believe to be false (after all, you don't tolerate things you agree with). Tolerance now means that you're supposed to accept every belief as true." (1) Josh McDowell echoes these sentiments in his work entitled, *The Last Christian Generation*, in which he demonstrates how the current postmodern culture has redefined certain words. McDowell offers the following list as an illustration.

- Tolerance—Accepting others without agreeing with or sharing their lifestyle choices (Your Understanding/Traditional Meaning).
- Tolerance—Accepting that each individual's beliefs, values, lifestyle, and truth claims are equal (Postmodern Understanding/Youth Culture).
- Respect—Giving due consideration to others beliefs and lifestyles without necessarily approving them (Traditional Meaning).
- Respect—Wholeheartedly approving of others' beliefs or lifestyle choices (Youth Culture).
- Acceptance—Embracing people for who they are, not necessarily for what they say or do (Traditional Meaning).
- Acceptance—Endorsing and even praising others for their beliefs and lifestyle choices (Youth Culture).

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are equally true or good or they would have no basis to argue that Nazism was a bad form of governance and American representative democracy is good.(13)

Paradoxically, pluralist advocates of the new tolerance are not really tolerant at all. They only tolerate those who already agree with them, which is not tolerance by anyone's definition. Furthermore, "are pluralists ready to accept as truth the religious beliefs of Muslim terrorists—especially when those beliefs say that all non-Muslims (including pluralists) should be killed?" (14) In the final analysis, pluralists' really do not believe in pluralism.

Conclusion

There is a big difference between being open minded and empty minded. Believers should be open minded in the sense that we recognize that while the Christian system is a system of truth we all hold some individual beliefs that may not be correct according to God's Word. In this sense we all continue to need instruction from God's word rightly divided to help correct the errors and road blocks in our own understanding. However, it is quite a different thing to be open minded to the point of embracing every wind of doctrine as valid. The only system of truth is the Christian system when the word is rightly divided. All non-Christian religions and denominational systems are systems of error with some truths.

Grace believers are a unique breed. Not only are we at odds with the world system, but we fight against a religious system that does not want the truth we are offering. Despite these challenges we need to acknowledge who we are and stand for it. We are exclusivists, who operate in the traditional definition of tolerance and are open minded enough that when we see truth we can embrace it and apply it to the details of our lives.

Endnotes:

- 1) Norman L. Geisler and Frank Turek. *I Don't Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist*. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 46.
- 2) Josh McDowell. *The Last Christian Generation*. (Holiday, FL: Green Key Books, 2006), 22-23.
- 3) David Horton. *The Portable Seminary*. (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2006), 420-421.
- 4) McDowell., 46.

Truth Verses Tolerance

Could there be two more exclusive statements than the ones quoted above? The testimony of the Scriptures is clear: Jesus Christ is the only way of salvation. It is only by placing saving faith in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ that mankind can be saved from sin and its penalty. True Biblical Christianity is an exclusive religion.

Rather than fleeing in intellectual embarrassment from this conclusion, believers need to embrace the soundness of their position and understand that it is the religious pluralists who are operating contrary to reason. First, “if holding an exclusivist view makes one intolerant, then pluralists are also intolerant, for they claim their view is true to the exclusion of opposing views (like exclusivism); they certainly would not tolerate the position that their pluralistic view and the nonpluralist views were both true.”(9) Second, the statement, “you ought not to question someone’s religious beliefs” is itself a religious belief for pluralists. Stated another way, pluralists think that all non-pluralists beliefs are wrong. Therefore, pluralists are just as dogmatic and close-minded as anyone making truth claims in the court of public opinion. (10) Finally, the entire notion of tolerance implies the existence of a real disagreement. People do not tolerate that which they agree with. Rather they embrace it. Consequently, the concept of tolerance presupposes a nonpluralist view of truth.(11)

In addition to the charge of intolerance, pluralists also accuse Christians of being narrow minded or intellectual imperialists. The allegation of narrow mindedness is laughable at best. Both pluralists (P) and exclusivists (E) make an equal claim to truth and error in that both claim that their view is true and whatever is opposed to it is false. Consider the following logical statements, If E is true, then all non-E is false. Similarly, if P is true, then all non-P is false. An evaluation of the facts demonstrates that charge of narrow mindedness is a hollow one because pluralists are just as narrow-minded as any exclusivist.(12)

The charge of intellectual imperialism stems from the notion that Christians only utilize the Bible as a source of truth and ought to be open to input from more than just one source. By calling exclusivists totalitarian, the pluralist is utilizing an *ad hominem* technique which attacks the person holding a particular position rather than answering the position in question. Moreover, the basis for this attack is unjustified because it assumes that truth should be more democratic, while in reality truth does not hinge on the number of inputs but correspondence with reality. Lastly, Pluralists do not really believe that all views

- Moral Judgments—Certain things are morally right and wrong as determined by God (Traditional Meaning).
- Moral Judgments—We have no right to judge another person’s view or behavior (Youth Culture).
- Personal Preference—Preferences of color, food, clothing style, hobbies, ect, are personally determined (Traditional Meaning).
- Personal Preference—Preferences of sexual behaviors, value systems, and beliefs are personally determined (Youth Culture).
- Personal Rights—Everyone has the right to be treated justly under the law (Traditional Meaning).
- Personal Rights—Everyone has the right to do what he or she believes is best for him or herself (Youth Culture).
- Freedom—Being free to do what you know you ought to do (Traditional Understanding).
- Freedom—Being able to anything you want to do (Youth Culture).
- Truth—An absolute standard of right and wrong (Traditional Understanding).
- Truth—Whatever is right for you (Youth Culture). (2)

These differences in meaning are more than just semantics. Rather, these shifting definitions explain the growing hostility toward the gospel in the marketplace of ideas. Young people evaluate the claims of Christianity through the diction and syntax of their own culture, which has distorted and redefined the meaning of words. Consequently, Christians are increasingly viewed as intolerant and close-minded.

As we have seen in previous pamphlets in this series, competing beliefs are possible but competing truths are not. One can believe everything is true, but one cannot make everything true. When it comes to religion, most religions have some beliefs that are true. However, not all religious beliefs can be true because they are mutually exclusive and teach opposites. (3) Consequently, some religious beliefs must be wrong. The laws of logic, specifically the laws of excluded middle and noncontradiction lead one to conclude that when two things are different they cannot be the same. Therefore, it is the height of absurdity to teach that all religious roads lead to God when the religions cannot even agree as to the nature and character of God. One should not be

so open-minded that they become empty-minded.

World Religions: Complementary or Contradictory?

Volumes have been written detailing the divergent teachings of the world's religions. The reality is that the world religions have more contradictory beliefs than complementary ones. The commonly held notion that all religions teach that mankind ought to love one another demonstrates a serious misunderstanding of the religious landscape. It is true that most religions have similar moral codes (best explained by the moral law written on the hearts of men), but the religions disagree on virtually every major doctrine including the nature of God, man, sin, salvation, heaven, hell, and creation.(4) Consider the following major areas of disagreement:

- Jews, Christians, and Muslims believe in different versions of a theistic God, while most Hindus and New Agers believe that everything that exists is part of an impersonal, pantheistic force.
- Many Hindus believe that evil is a complete illusion, while Christians, Muslims, and Jews believe that evil is real.
- Christians believe that people are saved by grace through faith while all other religions if they believe in salvation at all, teach some kind of salvation by good works.(5)

So much for the idea that all religions teach the same thing!

The Absurdity of Religious Pluralism

The religious freedom that Americans enjoy demonstrates the necessity of religious tolerance for the orderly functioning of our democracy. However, that is a far cry from suggesting that we ought to embrace the impossible notion that all religious beliefs are true. Since the various religious worldviews have mutually exclusive truth-claims, only one can be true. A true system of thought must be comprehensive of thought and life. Therefore, it must correspond to reality--past, present, and future, natural and supernatural.(6) Despite these clear contrasts between the teachings of the world's religions the religious pluralists demand that people accept all religious truth claims as being equally valid.

Religious pluralists routinely accuse Christians of being too exclusive, intolerant, and close-minded in their religious outlook. What do the pluralist supporters of the new tolerance mean when making such statements? Simply stated, exclusivism asserts the following with regard to a truth claim, "if one truth proposition is true, all propositions opposed to it must be false. This is based on the logical law of excluded middle. This law states that if A is true then all non-A is false."(7) When applied to religion, exclusivism holds that only one religion can be true, and all others opposed to it must be false.

In contrast, supporters of religious pluralism and the new tolerance will fall into one of the following viewpoints with regard to philosophy of religion: pluralism, relativism, or inclusivism. Please consider the following brief definition of each position:

- Pluralism—is the belief that every religion is true. Each provides a genuine encounter with the ultimate. (8)
- Relativism—is similar to pluralism, claiming that each religion is true to the one holding it. There is no objective truth in religion, so there are no criteria by which to determine which is best. (8)
- Inclusivism—claims that one religion is explicitly true, and all others are implicitly true. (8)

As we have already seen, religious pluralism is absurd based on the law of noncontradiction. Similarly, religious relativism will not hold water because relativism is self-defeating (see the pamphlet entitled What is Truth? An Introductory Study). Therefore, the intellectually honest reader is forced to concur with Scripture that there is only one pathway to God and consequently, only one right religion.

Defense of Biblical Exclusivism

Philosophically, religious exclusivism is the only position that makes sense. Therefore, it should not be surprising to the Bible believer that Scriptures assert and support an exclusivist view. Consider the following verses:

- John 14:6-- Jesus saith unto him, I am **the way, the truth, and the life**: no man cometh unto **the Father, but by me**.
- I Timothy 2:5-- For there is **one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus**;