

Can Christians be Tolerant?

Written by K B Napier

Thursday, 14 October 2010 10:01

In my ministry I occasionally publish letters and articles in the press. Usually, they attract the two extremes of response: 'for' and 'against'. But, one word emerges time and again - 'tolerance'. According to critics (both Christian and non-Christian) I am intolerant and therefore a bigot. This leads some Christians to label me as 'unloving' and 'arrogant', especially when my letters contain what they consider to be 'personal' or 'strong' wording. The superficial question is, are they correct? But the more pertinent question is: can Christians be tolerant? Is there a framework within which we may be tolerant? If so, tolerant of what?

On radio, a lecturer from Spurgeon's (Bible) College, UK, was talking with a British leader of the Hari Krishna (Hindu) cult, about what their respective beliefs said about religious tolerance. The cult leader asked the blunt question: *"Can salvation be found within our religion?"* Here was a golden opportunity, but what did the Spurgeon man say? He

"refused to answer the question as it was put"

! Instead, he waffled and concluded that God is not confined to any one religion (i.e. Christianity) but His 'presence' can be found in them all! (This seemed to align with his peculiar statement that God is

'present'

in Christ). The cult leader laughed in delight and said

"That's a marvellous Hindu statement!"

and the Spurgeon man replied

"I take that as a compliment"

! No, it was an insult and a sign of his godlessness and shame.

What should the answer have been to the original question? ***"NO! No-one can find salvation within Hinduism. God is NOT present in the Hindu cult. Salvation is ONLY in and through Christ Jesus."***

to But, to say that is

invite the hounds of the devil to chant 'bigot' and 'intolerant'. Is even *that* statement 'intolerant'? Yes, it is. Is such intolerance appropriate? Yes, it is. God is a jealous God. He does not and will not share His Glory with the vain beliefs and stupid 'gods' of so-called 'other' religions. On reading the word 'stupid', some will arise in anger and accuse me of being arrogant. I ask them to read Romans chapter one and then to search scripture. There we find that God Himself calls people stupid if they have beliefs in things that are unreal or opposed to Himself! Is

God

, then, 'arrogant'? We must never tolerate what God hates.

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Can Christians ever be tolerant? It depends on what your definition of 'tolerant' is and on what we are referring to. The word 'intolerant' is always applied to Believers who hold fast to what the Bible says. Yet, everybody is intolerant when it comes to their own beliefs (right or wrong ones), even humanists who claim to be totally tolerant of *everybody*, can be amongst the greatest bigots of them all!

So, let us propose a Biblical framework for the idea of 'tolerance':

1.

The Bible is our only framework. There is NO other valid framework - Muslim, Hindu, humanist, etc. Thus, this first statement is intolerant and is made with God's authority.

2.

Only the Christian Gospel leads to salvation. All other claims to salvation are false. This second statement is intolerant and is made with God's authority.

3.

Only Christ can save us. No other god or belief can offer salvation. This third statement is intolerant and is made with God's authority.

4.

We must not accept the claims or beliefs of 'other' religions as being valid. All other claims and beliefs are ultimately of Satan. This fourth statement is intolerant and is made with God's authority.

Can you see what is happening here? If we adhere to what God says in His word, then we **MUST** be intolerant of all other claims and beliefs. We have *no choice* and *no right* to say otherwise. The difficulty comes when Christians are unable to come to terms with living in what is, unfortunately, a multi-faith world (often referred to as the 'rich tapestry of life'!).

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Those who are not Believers have the earthly freedom to believe whatever they wish. This is not, however, to be mistaken for God's approval or commendation. God is certainly not tolerant of their unbelief and their man-made religions. He hates them fervently and their adherents will be cast into hell by Him. However, the Lord still allows them to live!

As Christians we are to be intolerant vocally, fully and totally, visibly and publicly, of all 'other' religions. Remaining silent is NOT acceptable, for silence is complicity. It condones what is not acceptable. In the UK today, people remain indoors when young thugs run riot outside their homes, smashing, pillaging, fighting and being abusive. If they remain indoors, they would then not be involved in the situation. But, they are already involved for the thugs get away with it. Next comes more violence, more crime and even murder. ***We condone what we do not oppose!***

This is Christian cowardice, NOT Christian virtue. Those thugs, who *actually* run riot every night of the week in many areas, do so because they are not opposed and are not dealt with. In the realm of beliefs it is the same. If we allow false religions and beliefs to speak without opposition, then we are not being 'tolerant', we are being spiritual cowards - salt that has lost its savour!

We must respect, and be tolerant of, people AS PEOPLE, as fellow human beings in their everyday acts of living (so long as they are not immoral, etc.). BUT WE MUST NEVER, EVER, RESPECT THEIR FALSE BELIEFS OR THEIR FALSE RELIGIONS. ***Never, ever.*** When it comes to ungodly beliefs we are to be INTOLERANT. This does not mean we must hurl abuse at them or refuse to work with them, etc. The only time we may refuse to work or sit with them, is if they actively and openly oppose God in a virulent way. In the normal course of life, there is no need to separate ourselves. We must not, though, seek close friendships with the unsaved on a social level. We must not join with those who openly condemn God. We must not join with those whose lives are openly immoral, unethical or oppressive. This goes for public authorities as well as for individuals.

When vocal Christians are attacked by others it is often on the platform of supposed 'tolerance'. One ought to note that when this happens, it is always in the context of what others wish to do. That is, YOU are 'intolerant' because you oppose what THEY are doing. ***They*** want to continue in their sin, so they call

you

'intolerant' and try to silence you. When fellow believers attack another Christian on grounds of intolerance, it is always because they wish to carry on doing or saying what is wrong in their own Christian lives! Thus the 'tolerance' they require is acceptance of their sins and not for any Biblical reason.

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