

TOLERANCE

By Raymond White

Every believer believes he or she is right in his or her own theology and that those who have a different opinion are by definition wrong.

Of course you believe you are right. If you don't believe you are right, you'd change your mind and believe something else. That goes without saying. It's tautological.

That of itself ("I'm right, you're wrong") is not a problem, that's just the nature of believing. The problem is when we believe that our rightness is so right that we are obliged to require others by some means (shouting? force? intimidation?) to believe as we do. That we call intolerance, or unbridled anger, and at its worst has caused Christians to burn other Christians at the stake or to die by other horrific means.

This natural impulse is of course not peculiar to religion, it crosses all human thought. People have killed each other over differing politics, far more than they ever have over religion. But religion is where we ought to expect better behavior because it is, after all, supposed to be centered around love.

It's alright to disagree. It's alright to argue and debate, that's how truth immerses. It's even alright to get angry as Jesus did when he cleansed the temple. But it is not alright to harm each other or to require by any means that others change their minds to accommodate our beliefs.

Our nation's founding fathers built into our constitution protections against just such hostilities. Our first amendment guarantees (well, so long as our government allows it to guarantee) freedom of religion and freedom of speech, and those guarantees have made this a wonderful country — so far anyway, we'll have to wait and see what's ahead.

But doesn't the bible require people to be Jewish? That's intolerance. Actually, no. It does not. The Torah defines many crimes to be capital crimes (with a death penalty): murder, kidnapping, sexual misbehavior, and others. But nowhere does the Torah define unbelief to be a capital crime or a crime at all. Sin is a crime. Not believing is not a crime, not anywhere in the bible, and that is one of the reasons why the bible is superior to other holy books — it does not require you to believe it, and that makes it a book worth believing because unforced belief is the only belief that matters.

What does the bible say about tolerance? Anything? Well, somethings. Here then is my short list of tolerance verses. As I find other relevant verses I will add them.

[1] THE HOUSE OF RIMMON

2 Kings 5:18 In this thing the LORD pardon thy servant [Naaman], that when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon: when I bow down myself in the house of Rimmon, the LORD pardon thy servant in this thing. :19 And he [Elisha] said unto him [Naaman], Go in peace.

Are we absolutely forbidden to participate in a false religion? Some Christians won't even go into the place of worship of another Christian church because they feel that other churches are apostate. What happened in this story of Naaman nudges us to a more tolerant view.

Naaman is now a believer in the true God, but his employer is the aging king of Syria. What Naaman is concerned about is that when he helps his boss go to church (so to speak) and helps his boss bow to a false god in a false house of worship, he himself, Naaman, is required to bow with him. Naaman is asking the prophet Elisha, am I offending God when I do that? And Elisha's answer is no, you're fine, "Go in peace."

[2] THE MAGICIANS OF BABYLON

Daniel 2:24 Therefore Daniel went in unto Arioch, whom the king and ordained to destroy the wise men of Babylon: he went and said thus unto him; Destroy not the wise men of Babylon:

This is a vital point. Daniel used his privileged knowledge to save the lives of false prophets. He could have used this opportunity to kill all of them and install Jewish religion everywhere, but he didn't. This is a foundation verse for religious tolerance.

The Mormon church has a list of Articles of Faith which summarizes their core beliefs. One of them I call the article of tolerance. It reads thus —

Article of Faith 11: We claim the right to worship almighty God according to the dictates of our own conscience and allow all men the same privilege. Let them worship how, where, or what they may.

This article guarantees that there will never be a Mormon inquisition.

That sentiment is today (finally) pretty much an axiom of most of Christianity. It will be nice when it is also an axiom of all religions and political leanings worldwide. That will be a day to bless.

A further thought on Daniel —

Daniel 2:30 But as for me, this secret is not revealed to me for any wisdom that I have more than any living, but for their sakes that shall make known the interpretation to the king, and that thou mightiest know the thought of their hearts.

The reason that God revealed the king's dream to Daniel was for their sakes. In other words, God did it to save the lives of the magicians. That goes beyond tolerance. That is genuine caring for people who believe differently than ourselves.

[3] ISRAEL AND EVERYONE ELSE

Yes, it is true that Israel was (is) an elect nation (*Isaiah 45:4*), the apple of God's eye (*Deuteronomy 32:10*). But God never intended for Israel to have an "us only" relationship with him. What God had always intended was —

Genesis 12:3 ... and in thee [Abraham] shall all the families of the earth be blessed.

[4] YOUR CALLING

You may believe that you belong to God's only true church. Many Christians believe that, and I won't challenge that — I'm sure there is merit in your claim. But do remember that whatever dispensation, or revelation, or commission you believe you and your people have received from God, God gave that truth to you to bless others, not to pick a fight.

Further, I ask you to consider at least the possibility that others have also received a directive which, while different from his directive to you, is from God anyway. Just consider that maybe that's true, and therefore we should treat all Christians as fellow servants working for a common goal after all.

***Luke 9:49** And John answered and said, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name; and we forbade him, because he followeth not with us. **:50** And Jesus said unto him, Forbid him not: for he that is not against us is for us.*

***Numbers 11:27** And there ran a young man, and told Moses, and said, Eldad and Medad do prophecy in the camp. **:28** And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of Moses, one of his young men, answered and said, My lord Moses, forbid them. **:29** And Moses said unto him, would God that all the LORD's people were prophets, and that the LORD would put his spirit upon them.*

***John 21:21** Peter seeing him [John] saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do? **:22** Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou me. [Don't worry about John's business, you just take care of your own.]*

God has asked you to do something, good, do that. But maybe God has asked someone else to do something else. Don't you be so concerned about what God has asked others to do and how they're faring, unless of course you want to be helpful now and then, and that would be good.

Here's a brief story to illustrate this whole thing: The first Catholic church built in Salt Lake City was built on a plot of land that was given to the Catholic church by Brigham Young as a gift. The message was clear: "Welcome."