

An Introduction to APOLOGETICS II:

**(The Biblical Antidote for the
Poisonous Thinking of Our Times)**



**Bible Studies Taught during the Wednesday Evening
Midweek Services in 2012**

by

Pastor Kevin Redig

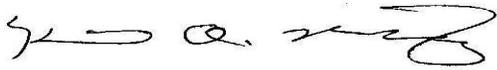
Author's Note: An Introduction to Apologetics

If you completed the first study in this series, then you know that, in the Christian context, apologetics applies to a reasoned defense of what one believes.

Although certainly appropriate with respect to the lost world in which the Church is meant to be salt and light, I find the subject matter of apologetics to be particularly important for the individual Christian. For example, the pressure applied by this world to “be tolerant” is nearly suffocating—never mind that what so many in today’s world mean by tolerance is the embracing of one increasingly deviant behavior after another.

So if you have struggled with this pressure, I think you will find this study to be helpful in revealing to you the Divine perspective on the subject of tolerance, and in doing so, help you to more boldly “contend for the faith!”

In His grace,



Kevin Redig, Pastor
Vistoso Community Church



Part 1: Introduction

The first question is “What kind of a study is this?” The answer—it is a study within the realm of apologetics! In the legal system of the ancient Greeks, the prosecution laid out the *categoria*, and then the defense responded with the *apologia*. The English word *apologetics* came directly from the pronunciation of the Greek word—this is called transliteration. Over time apologetics has come to mean the discipline of defending a position, often religious, through the systematic use of information.

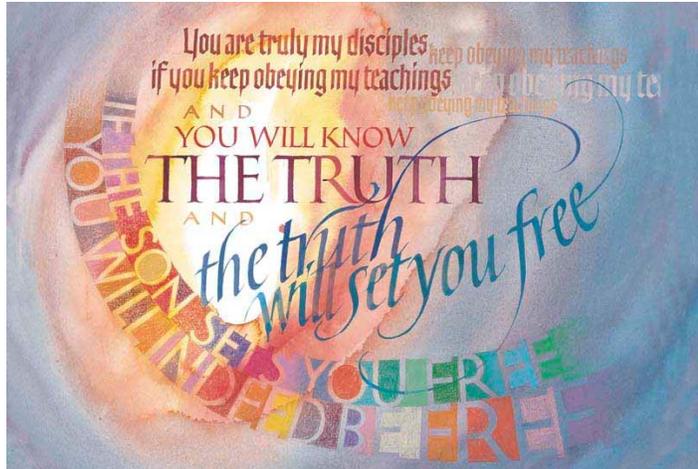
There are two things to note. First, do not confuse this with the similar sounding English word *apology*. To engage in apologetics is not to make an apology for your religious convictions—it is to vigorously and logically defend them! Second, the word does not necessarily have a Christian connotation. In fact, there are currently many more trained and active Muslim apologists than Christian.

The second question to discuss is “How long is this study is going to be?” The short answer is not long! Our typical Bible study is in essence a building project; that is, the intent is to *buildup* believers in the faith through line-by-line and precept-by-precept investigation of God’s Word. This study is different—you can think of it more like an inoculation against a particularly nasty virus. As a result, this study will by nature be of shorter duration.

The third question, and this is where we will actually begin our study, is “Why are we doing this?” In order to keep things organized, let me break the answer down into a series of points.

1. **Lots of error.** Our minds are bombarded with a steady stream of input: radio, TV, Internet, print media, the opinions of others, and so on. Most of the information that comes in has a truth/error ratio which is very small, that is just a little bit of truth and lots of error. Now, I am not talking about things like the reported high temperature for the day. Instead, I am talking about the analysis that typically accompanies most of what we receive from outside sources. And so, I am saying that the amount of truth, from the Divine perspective, is in very small proportion when compared with the almost overwhelming flood of erroneous information that comes our way. Let me give you one example. How often are issues associated with the Middle East in the news? Without doubt—every day! Is it fair to say that this daily stream of information consists of things like—the plight of the Palestinians, pre or post 1967 borders, Iran and the bomb, and so forth? I think you will have to agree it is! In the midst of this daily information and analysis that comes your way, when is the last time that you heard anyone state as a propositional truth that God gave Palestine to the Jews as an ever-lasting possession (Genesis 13:14-15)? You may agree or disagree with this statement, but check out the cited passage and you will see that it is Biblical. And, since it is Biblical, shouldn’t it be at least some part of the dialogue with respect to what to do in the Middle East?

Yet, except for purely Christian sources, I have never even once heard it brought up despite the daily presence of the Middle East in the news and daily dialogue regarding what to do about the problems there. I maintain that the absence of a Biblical perspective is because the amount of truth that comes our way from sources in the world is exceedingly small.



2. **High alert.** The amount of error in our lives must be a cause of concern for us as Christians. It should cause *alarm bells* to go off in our thinking that are not silenced until we have some sort of plan in place to deal with the huge volume of error to which we are daily exposed. Here are some reasons why we should be *on high alert!*

- If the truth sets you free . . .

*“If you hold to My teaching, you are really My disciples.
Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.”*

John 8:31-32

. . . then what does error do? This passage explicitly tells us that the truth of God’s Word sets us free. However, don’t overlook that fact that it also implicitly tells us that error will bind us; that is, it make us its slave. We all have certain suppositions and views through which we view life. To the extent those suppositions consist of error, we are enslaved to those errors. It should give us pause to realize that we could go through life enslaved to certain erroneous systems of thought. For example, the man who thinks that happiness lies in the abundance of his material possessions will one day wake up to find that, along with such things as a ruined marriage, family, and health, he devoted the energies of his life to a lie!

- Behind error is a cunning intellect. I refer, of course, to Satan.

*But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent’s
cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray
from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ. 2 Corinthians 11:3*

Notice first of all the reference to the “serpent”—this is a common term for Satan (Revelation 12:9). Then notice that he applied his intellect (cunning) in order to deceive Eve.

On the one hand, this isn't surprising, since we know that as the "Father of lies" (John 8:44), whenever he speaks, it is going to be a falsehood. However, on the other hand, you can see what we are up against. The error that comes our way is often designed to look and sound good, again not surprising since Satan masquerades as an "angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14). But, in the final analysis, it is a lie that will only lead us astray from devotion to our Lord and Savior!

- It is possible for error to become so pervasive that we allow it to "live in our land."

"Do not let them live in your land, or they will cause you to sin against Me, because the worship of their gods will certainly be a snare to you." Exodus 23:33

God is laying down guidelines for His people as they move toward the land He has provided for them. Specifically, He does not want the Israelites to allow the pagan people currently in the land to contaminate the Israelite community. If they do, He knows their evil practices of idolatry will cause His people to go astray. In the same way, if we allow the evil thought patterns of our day to take up residence in our minds and become part of our day-to-day worldview—they too will cause us to be "led astray from our sincere and pure devotion to Christ."

Perhaps you are thinking, "We live in an entirely different day and age and idolatry is not a problem!" Perhaps, but tell me what you think about the following statement:

"The purpose of life is enjoyment and personal fulfillment."

To any Biblically-oriented Christian, this phrase certainly has hedonistic overtones. And in fact, one could make the case that there is an idol in view—self! We should all be shocked to learn that in a recent Barna survey, 50% of supposed evangelicals agreed with this statement! I would submit that the Christian community has allowed quite a bit of the erroneous thinking of our day to "live in our land" after all.

3. **Baffling Error.** Not only are we routinely exposed to a large amount of error, which should be a cause of concern for every Christian, but it is my opinion that we are on a particularly steep dip in the truth/error ratio. Furthermore, the error of our times is not only virulent and pervasive; it is also baffling.

I suppose that Christians of every generation lament the godlessness prevalent in their day. Nonetheless, things seem to have declined sharply during my lifetime. In addition, not only do we find egregious error in almost every segment of our society, it seems to be particularly aggressively anti-Christian. I also suspect that many Christians, especially older Christians, find the thinking of our day baffling.

By this I mean it just doesn't make much sense and it is, therefore, hard to counter when it comes up in everyday dialogue. We will discuss this in detail later, but for now let me just say there is a reason you may be having trouble grasping the thinking of our times. It is not that there is anything wrong with your Christian perspective; but, rather, that the prevailing philosophical underpinnings of modern thought have departed so far from the truth and have gone to such ridiculous lengths in order to try to make sense out of life, that there is very little overlap between your worldview and what is often called the *postmodern* worldview. The gap is bridgeable, but it will just take a bit of discernment which we will discuss in due time.

4. **Consequences for our witness.** Of course, the pervasive error of our day has consequences for the lost! Specifically, it is that much harder for them to recognize their need and come to grips with the truth. However, this paper is primarily meant for those who are intent on reaching the lost—and I want you to realize that the nature and extent of error with which we are constantly bombarded can have an impact on us as well.
- First, it can lead to a sense of hopelessness in the face of what often seems to be an overwhelming flood of competing information. Between television, TiVo, I-pods, the Internet, and so forth, even if people came face to face with the truth, how would they ever recognize it in the face of such sensory overload?
 - I also think we can begin to doubt the relevance of the answer we have for the “hope that is within us” in the face of so many competing ideas. I am not saying we doubt the truth of the Gospel, but rather we begin to doubt whether it can get through to those steeped in the thinking of our times, for example college students, our grandchildren, the lost.
 - This can unfortunately lead us to keep our own faith *bottled-up* in the face of doubts about the relevance of the Gospel to our times. Or worse yet, it might even allow doubt to begin to nibble away at the edges of our own personal faith.

5. **Study Goals.** So then, here are the goals of this study:

- I want to point out a few of the errors of our day and their associated world-view.
- I want to show you that there is “nothing new under the sun!”

*What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again;
there is nothing new under the sun.* Ecclesiastes 1:9

Despite the nature of the error of our day—it hasn't taken God by surprise, and His Word is completely capable of addressing every error with the light of the truth. In fact, the thinking of lost man is never as original as we give it credit for being! On the contrary, it tends to be nothing more than the recycled junk of the past. For example, we point to the rejection of absolute truth and the relativism of our day as characteristic of modern day *postmodernism*.

However, look at the problem documented in the passage below, which was written thousands of years ago.

In those days, Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit in their own eyes. Judges 17:6

And, of course, the book of Judges documents the terrible outcome when relativism rules the day.

- I want you to see clear evidence that there is a Biblical antidote for every attack the enemy can muster. God never has been, and never will be, caught off guard by the schemes of Satan. On the contrary, His Word contains everything we need for “life and godliness!”
- Even better, I want to build your confidence in the fact that every rebellious attitude in the heart of man creates opportunities for the light of the Gospel. The greater the darkness in the hearts of men—the greater the contrast when compared to the light of truth!
- Lastly, I am going to try and be as practical as possible so that your hearts might be encouraged with the specifics of how to deal with the error of our times, and, as you have opportunity, provide an answer to those who might be searching for hope.

With the above in mind, let’s begin our investigation by considering the extreme emphasis in our day on the topic of “tolerance.”



Part 2: Tolerance

Let me bridge from our opening discussion to this lesson by making the statement that “If tomorrow, all of a sudden ideas were visible, when you walked outside you would be scared by what you saw!” If you looked at the sky in this picture and knew that erroneous thoughts are green and the truth blue, wouldn’t that image give you a scare?



This picture is actually an image associated with some intense solar activity early in 2012. It has been selected simply to illustrate the concept of the overwhelming nature of the error in our society.

With this idea in mind, I want to remind you that we have simple theses:

- Error (in contrast to divine viewpoint as found in the Bible) is pervasive.
- The Christian must be on guard against the constant onslaught of error!

And I want to remind you of our simple goal; specifically, to demonstrate that God’s Word has the antidote for every organized system of error!

Distorted View of Tolerance

With this introduction in mind, let’s begin our discussion of one of the poisons of our day—a distorted view of the topic of tolerance.

Current World View of Tolerance

When the world around us calls for tolerance, it doesn’t mean this quote often attributed to Voltaire, but actually written by E.B. Hall to describe Voltaire’s view of personal freedom:

“I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it.”

The world is also not reflecting what might truly be considered tolerance as expressed in this verse of Scripture:

“. . .choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, . . .But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord. Joshua 24:15

Instead the current world view of tolerance means that you must not just tolerate—but embrace whatever the currently in vogue brand of degeneracy happens to be! You will find today's *tolerance* standing by such frivolous statements as the following, which was made by the superintendent of the largest school board in America.

“The only thing we won't tolerate is intolerance!”

Does this school superintendent really mean that in her school district they are going to tolerate cheating, teachers abusing students, and other unacceptable behaviors? Can't she think through her own position to the point she realizes that her position means that if there is anything at all she won't tolerate that would make her intolerant?

The *tolerance* of our day sees no problem at all with the following situation:

At Texas Tech University (Lubbock), Michael Dini, professor of biology, said he would not recommend any students for medical school if they did not believe in evolution. Dini's university rushed to defend him on the grounds of academic freedom.

But those touting their tolerance work themselves into an indignant dither over the following types of statements by believers:

***At Sydney University in Australia, a number of top academics signed the following statement in a full-page student newspaper advertisement:
“On any criteria, Jesus Christ is one of the great figures of history. More than that, his claims to be the Son of God, who has made God known and taken away the sins of the world, bear up under the closest scrutiny. This is our conviction, and we urge every student to thoroughly investigate this unique figure, Jesus.”***

This statement evoked hysteria about religious intolerance and misuse of academic freedom. Some anti-Christian students even raised fears about discrimination.

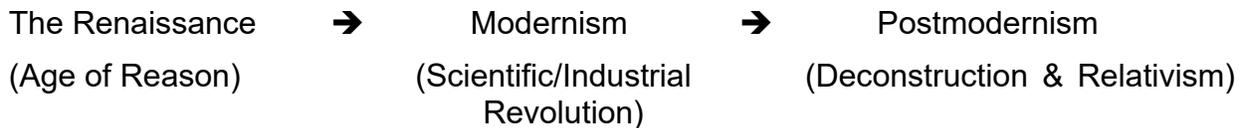
Do you see the point we have reached? On the one hand, there is complete tolerance of a blatant example of outright discrimination. Potentially religious discrimination. On the other hand, we find intolerance against a group simply stating their opinion in a forum which is supposed to be open to dialogue about truth!



Historical Perspective

At this early juncture in our discussion, I want to ask the question, “How did we get to such an unbalanced and inconsistent position?” In order to answer this question, we need to start a new thread that deals with a little bit of history:

We often hear the terms postmodern, relativism, modernity, and the like—these are slippery terms on which it is hard to get a firm grasp. Let me first lay them out chronologically:



Let me offer the following explanations:

- Many begin with a period called *pre-modernism*, but I think you will more readily recognize the term Renaissance, which runs from roughly the 14th through the 17th centuries. The Protestant Reformation is placed squarely in this period and coincides with a re-awakening of thinking at all levels of culture.
- History then flows into the modern period in which the ideas of the Renaissance become the scientific and industrial revolutions of more modern times. Ideas such as evolution, geologic uniformitarianism, and big-bang cosmologies either came to light or began their development during this time period.
- Postmodernism follows modernism as modernism fails to deliver on its promise of utopian civilization. This phase is more difficult to date. By the end of WWI, Europe was clearly in the throes of postmodernism. However, many would say it hadn't really taken hold in the United States until as late as the 1970's. You can think of it as beginning with the “God is dead” movement; and then moving into relativism (no such thing as absolute truth) and deconstructionism (no text has any meaning until the reader gives it one).

There are a couple of things you should note. First, these are not so much hard chronological boundaries as they are the flowing of one way of looking at life into another. This is in large part because the trends in the arts lead the way. For example, there are far more postmodern philosophers in the day in which we live than there are postmodern engineers—most of whom, for obvious reasons, remain modernists.

My goal in laying it out this way is for you to realize that you already have a pretty good feel for this. You know that the Renaissance was a resurgence of thinking and dialogue, followed by a time of great scientific advance. Where we are now depends upon your age. If you are older, you don't understand the thinking of our day because relativism and deconstruction don't make any sense to you. If you are younger, you struggle to make sense out of a world in which there are no anchors—no absolutes.

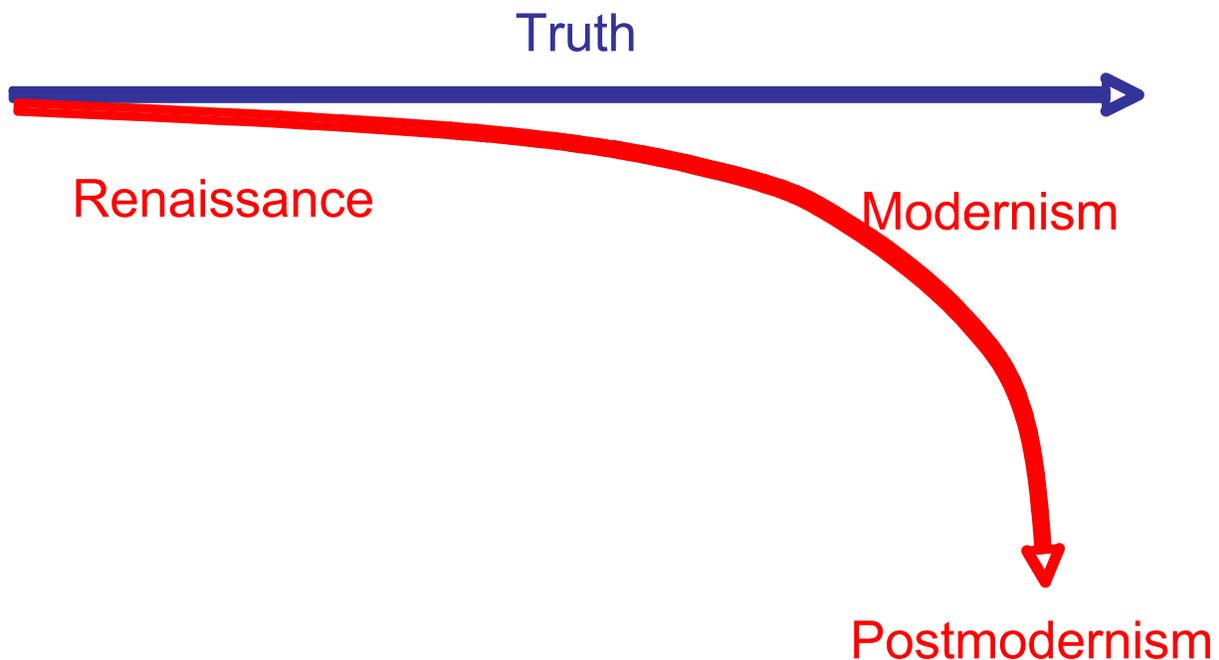
As one last way of explaining the above trends, I have found the following baseball analogy to be useful. You have heard the saying, “There’s balls and there’s strikes. . .”

- The Renaissance man says “I call them as they are!”—a recognition of trying to come to grips with reality.
- The Modernist says, “I call them as I see ‘em”—now it is about the measurements associated with the scientific method.
- The Postmodernist says, “There ain’t nothing until I call ‘em.”—now you see the odd thing about the day in which we live—we are the ones who declare what is true and what is false, and we do it on a personal level. Very strange indeed!

As you try to make sense out of the above and put it into some kind of framework you can understand, let me ask you to think about the following. If the God of the Bible really does exist and He has communicated truth to us, then here is the terrible dilemma in which the postmodern man is going to find himself—his protestations notwithstanding!

Hell is to realize too late that absolute and transcendent truth does, in fact, exist!

Now I haven’t done anything unusual by defining the terms modernism, postmodernism, and so forth. You can readily find out much more by simply doing an internet search. However, at this point, I want to show you something you may not have seen before. Let me show you these ideas relative to Biblical truth.



Today's Postmodern Thought

So, it is in today's pattern of postmodern thought that we have the modern day nonsense of *tolerance*, in which the only readily acceptable form of intolerance is to:

- Disparage orthodox Christianity!
- Attack Christian institutions (like marriage and family)!
- Ridicule Christian virtues and values!

Perhaps you are thinking, "Don't call the opinions of others *nonsense*!" You need to be a little bit more tolerant. Listen, it is my personal observation that the people who spout this stuff are completely inconsistent with it. They will, on the one hand, with total indifference, defend abortion as a legitimate *choice*; and then, on the other hand, give an impassioned plea regarding the threat to the human race posed by global warming. In fact, I recently viewed a short documentary on the plight of unwanted dogs where the host repeatedly asked for "prayer" for all these suffering animals. In what kind of upside-down universe do we "pray" for dogs after denying the existence of God and without compunction pull baby human beings out of their mothers in order to terminate them? Real tolerance has nothing to do with the drama that is being played out in our society!

God's View of Tolerance

Let's ask three questions of primary import to our discussion.

- Is God tolerant?
- Is God's revelation—the Bible—tolerant?
- Are His followers supposed to be tolerant?

The answers to these questions are, of course, supremely relevant to our discussion, typically misrepresented by the world, and the answers will take some time to unravel. The short answer to these questions is "It depends!" The long answer is a bit more involved.

God's Tolerance. There are some areas in which God is hugely tolerant.

*You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else. . .
or do you show contempt for the riches of His kindness, tolerance
and patience, not realizing that God's kindness
leads you toward repentance? (Romans 2:1-4)*

There is much to study closely regarding the context of this passage; however, it is clear that God is tolerant and patient towards all category of mankind in order to give them the opportunity to repent, that is to change their minds about Him! This tolerance on God's part is even more striking in the following passage:

The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. 2 Peter 3:9-10



God is so tolerant toward the human race, that rather than coming in judgment right now, He is holding off, giving us time, that we might turn to Him. Some try to use this delay against God in order to claim He is not there and is not coming—they have simply failed to recognize it for what it is—tolerance! God is tolerating the rebellion of the human race so that those who will place their faith in Him are able to be reconciled and brought back into the family of God.

God Doesn't Tolerate Everything. In contrast, there is much of which God is not tolerant!

- God is intolerant regarding sin:

"Let the wicked forsake his ways and the unrighteous man his thoughts. . . Isaiah 55:7

- God is intolerant regarding the means by which man can be saved:

Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved. Acts 4:12

Enter through the narrow gate. . .broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many enter. . .but narrow the road that leads to life. . . Matthew 7:13-14

Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. John 3:18

This, of course, puts God on a collision course with the way our world today defines tolerance. God is only willing to tolerate one means of salvation while being intolerant of every other religious approach designed by man. Not surprisingly, man—especially religious man—can get pretty worked up over this and is quick to label the Christian as intolerant! It is God they are really accusing of intolerance in an arena in which He has every right to establish means. To paraphrase an old saying: “He who owns heaven gets to make the rules about how you get there!”

The Need for Selective Tolerance

It appears, from our brief discussion above, that tolerance must be applied selectively by a Biblically-informed mind! Isn't this both our experience and just plain common sense? For example, growing up in my home I learned that my parents were not going to tolerate any and every type of behavior on my part. There was some language they were going to tolerate and some they weren't. There were some pursuits they tolerated as admirable, and some they rejected as either detrimental or a waste of time. Furthermore, it was to my benefit to conform to their discernment on what should be tolerated and what would not be tolerated and it continues to shape my behavior to this day—again, to my blessing.

Making the *right call* on selective tolerance can be a challenge for the believer in today's world, which is so clearly under Satan's influence! On the one hand, it is tempting to just pull back and isolate ourselves from interacting with our fallen world—create a *holy-huddle* of sorts with other like-minded believers. The words of famed missionary C. T. Studd challenge this approach:

***Some wish to live within the sound of Church or Chapel bell;
I want to run a Rescue Shop within a yard of hell.*** C. T. Studd

If we pull back and isolate, we ignore the purpose for which God has left us here. That is we ignore our mandate to act as His ambassadors—representing Him to a lost and needy world.

On the other end of the spectrum, we have to avoid *going native*! By this phrase I mean becoming so conformed to this world that we become indistinguishable from it! The Christian is called to be set apart and distinct—that's the basic idea of sanctification! God has always called His people to “*come out from them and be separate. . .*” 2 Corinthians 6:17.

Someone has wisely said, “We are to be in the world, but not of the world!”



And between these two extremes is the choice, made far too often by Christians, of keeping up the pretext of following Christ while tolerating those things which are intolerable to Him.

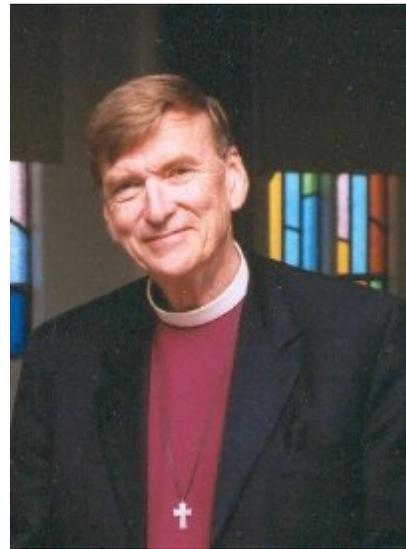
Tolerating the Intolerable

Let me show you what tolerating the intolerable looks like when it occurs within the church! Consider the comments of Bishop John Shelby Spong collected from his various writings:

A view of the cross as the place where the sins of the world were judged is a barbaric concept that must be dismissed.

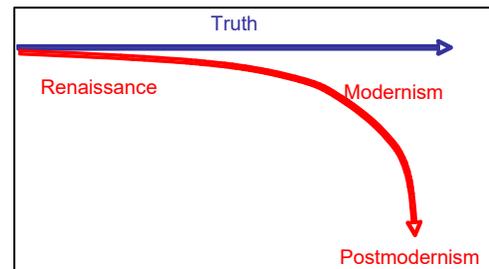
The resurrection is not a physical reality, and there are no scriptural standards which transcend time and culture.

This man denies the work of the cross, denies the reality of the resurrection and removes usefulness of the Scriptures as revelation from God. In one fell swoop, he has gutted Christianity!



Perhaps you are thinking, “There are always those who will attack Christianity!” Of course, but just who is this man? He is an ordained Anglican Bishop who for over 40 years taught from a pulpit inside of a supposedly Christian church. When the media wants the Christian perspective, they go to this man and ask him and then air his answers to millions! He is purported to speak for us!

Do you remember the drawing I showed you earlier? At first, we tolerated a little bit of error in the church as we allowed human philosophical positions to effect our thinking. Then more error appeared as Darwinian evolution was allowed to go largely unchallenged. Today, we have reached the point where postmodern thought has become pervasive in the church—and notice how the errors of our day are now taking us away from the truth at a right angle—as direct a departure as it is possible to make.



What would cause us to put up with such drivel? What would lead us to tolerate that which is intolerable? Perhaps you are thinking, “So you have provided one isolated example—it’s not that big of a deal!” Consider the *emerging church movement*, which is considered evangelical in nature and one of the fastest growing segments of so-called Christianity in the English speaking world.

Here is what several of the emerging church leaders have to say:

I must add, though, that I don't believe making disciples must equal making adherents to the Christian religion. It may be advisable in many (not all!) circumstances to help people become followers of Jesus and remain within their Buddhist, Hindu, or Jewish contexts.

Brian McLaren, the most influential emerging church leader in the U.S.



How can making disciples not equate to making adherents to the Christian religion? When words are assigned meaning—this statement reduces to gibberish. However, in postmodern thought, you can assign to words any meaning you would like. Here is another example from Brian McLaren's writing:

I don't know why Jesus went to the cross and I don't really think he did either. Brian McLaren

To be fair to the source, this statement was in a fictional work written by McLaren. However, it is part of a dialogue in which the pastor-hero of the story was counseling a confused member of his congregation. The above is the answer given by the story's hero to the confused individual. Of this you can be assured—God is not in the least going to tolerate such attacks against the works of His Son! Now consider these two statements by Tony Jones, who is a leading figure in the emerging church movement and postmodern Christianity:

"So we must stop looking for some objective Truth that is available when we delve into the text of the Bible."

Tony Jones in his book Postmodern Youth Ministry, p. 201



"I now believe that GLBTQ [Gay, Lesbian, Bisexuals, Transgender, and Queers] can live lives in accord with biblical Christianity (as least as much as any of us can!), and that their monogamy can and should be sanctioned and blessed by church and state." Tony Jones

I included the first so that you can see what the postmodern mindset looks like inside the church when it comes to youth ministry. The second, so that you can see just how worldly, at least in some arenas, Christianity has become!

So let me summarize at this point so that you do not lose the flow of the discussion. God tolerates some things—and not others. This means the Christian must make Biblically informed decisions to tolerate some things, while being intolerant of others.

This is a challenge for the Christian, and one which large segments of the church have failed by allowing many of the intolerable errors in thinking of our day to permeate both the pulpit and the pew within the very assemblies of those who are meant to be “called out ones” and distinct from this world! We have allowed this to happen by tolerating that which should not have been tolerated for even one instant! How did we ever get into such a mess?

Not What God Expects

We have gotten ourselves into this predicament because Satan is a master strategist. He knows that the Christian is more tolerant than anyone else of the *fallenness* and failures of others. In other words, the Christian expects those who the Bible says are “dead in their trespasses and sins” and “separated from God because of the emptiness of their thinking” to act as if they were, well—spiritually dead and foolish!

However, what Satan has tried to do is to use our *tolerance* for the lostness of man against us, by attempting to get us to cross boundaries—in the name of tolerance—which have already been clearly delineated in the Scriptures. This is how the opinions of a Bishop Spong or the leaders of the latest so-called Christian movement have been tolerated in the church. This toleration has led to mixing truth with error and compromising the distinctive role and function of the church. This is unbiblical in every way, and not in any way the kind of tolerance that God has displayed toward the human race and wants His people to have for the lost world around them. Let me prove this to you from the Scriptures.

As we turn to the Scriptures, let me remind you of an earlier point—tolerance is to be applied selectively by a Biblically-informed mind! There is much we must tolerate from the lost as we seek to be used by God to bring them to Himself. On the other hand, we will see there are some things we should not tolerate for even an instant.

Let me begin by showing you tolerance and intolerance side-by-side, dependent upon the context:

⁹I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—¹⁰not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. ¹¹But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat.

¹²What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? ¹³God will judge those outside. “Expel the wicked man from among you.”

1 Corinthians 5:9-13

Notice how in verses nine and ten the expectation is that the believer will *tolerate*, in fact expect, sinful behavior on the part of lost people. Again, verses twelve and thirteen leave judgment of them up to God. On the other hand, verse eleven gives direction to be completely intolerant of this same kind of behavior inside the church. We are told not to eat with someone who acts in such a sinful way as described in the text and claims to be a fellow believer. In fact, verse thirteen tells us to expel this type of believer from the fellowship. It is very clear that what we are to tolerate outside the church is not to be tolerated within.

We can see this same thing in the indictment handed down upon the church in Thyatira in the book of Revelation—note, this is specifically addressed to a local church fellowship regarding the issue of tolerance.

Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. . . . Revelation 2:18-f



Jezebel and her teaching were not to be tolerated inside the church. Again, we can clearly see God's expectation that things be different inside the church. Let's consider one more passage in order to see why.

As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be My people." Therefore, "Come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you will be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." 2 Corinthians 6:16-17

This New Testament reference is really an Old Testament quote from the book of Isaiah—making clear God's intent for His people of all ages. Specifically, God's people are to step out of the context of lost humanity and separate themselves unto God. We are to be a distinctive people! This is because God himself is separate and distinct in every way from His creation, and we are to bear witness to His distinctiveness by being a *called-out* people ourselves. So you can see it would be natural for us to tolerate fallen behavior in the context of a fallen people, but completely inappropriate for us to tolerate fallen behavior (or thinking) among the people of God who are called out to be separate as unto the Lord!

Consequences of Tolerance

Here is another way for us to come to grips with the same principle—tolerance has consequences! For example, what happens if we tolerate a cancerous tumor within the body? The recent death of Steve Jobs dramatically illustrates this point. He allowed an operable form of cancer in his pancreas to go untreated by surgery for nine months. By the time he did pursue surgery, it had involved multiple areas and spread. From the evidence available, it is quite likely that he lost many years of productive life, and in fact regretted his decision prior to his death. And so in the context of tolerating sin in the church, I ask the same question again—what happens if we tolerate cancer within the body? It kills the patient—and this same consequence can occur to the spiritual life of a church fellowship that is tolerant of error in its midst!

I would suggest a test to help determine whether or not we should tolerate some way of thinking or behavior. Ask yourself, “Can I live with the consequences of tolerance—personally, corporately, and in the light of the Lord’s scrutiny—or do I sense a *poison* to which I must apply the Biblical antidote?”

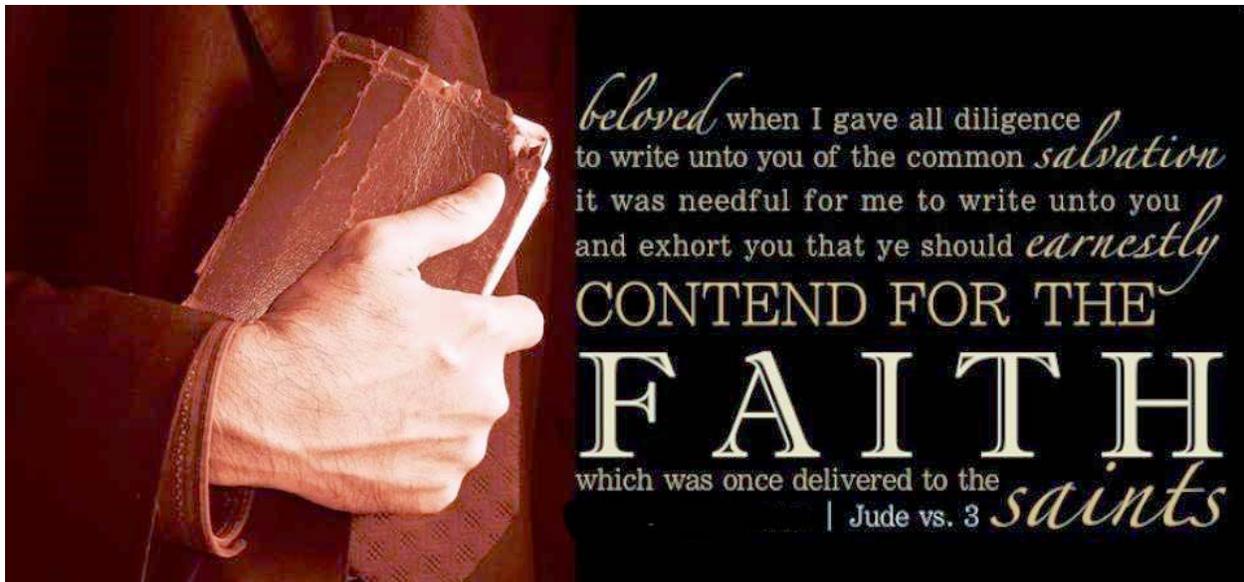
Let me give you just one scenario out of the nearly infinite number of possibilities. Should I tolerate my lost neighbor’s way of thinking about happiness, life, and material possessions? I think you probably should—what they really need is the Lord, and so look for ways to open a spiritual dialogue with them and *tolerate* this lostness. After all, isn’t this what the Lord has done with the human race by letting human history continue?

On the other hand, if the thinking of that lost neighbor starts to have an influence on your family, specifically your children—what about that? I would suggest that when ungodly attitudes, attributable to the influence of others, starts to show up in our families, we should become intolerant. Parents, especially fathers, need to address errors in thinking before they have time to take root and settle in—this is certainly to be intolerant of the thinking of this world. And, of course, what should we do if error starts to show up in our church fellowship? Same answer, we need to be intolerant toward anything which would compromise the function of the Body of Christ and its witness to Him.

Chief Antidote for the World’s Tolerance

Let’s close by looking at the chief *antidote* for the world’s siren call to tolerance by turning to the book of Jude, Verse 3:

Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.



There it is, right in Verse 3—the Biblical antidote for the world’s version of tolerance. Notice that what Jude really wants to do is to write about the God’s gift of salvation, which he shares along with his audience. And, of course, this is what every Bible teacher wants to do! However, he had to set aside his preferences in order to urge his audience (and us) to “contend for the faith” that has been entrusted to us. You see, it is not enough for us to just bask in the content of material associated with spiritual growth. For we serve in *enemy territory* and so we must routinely have our spiritual instruction interrupted, in order to be reminded of our need to “contend for the faith.”

Notice, it didn’t say to be contentious for the faith, or to be obnoxious for the faith, but to “contend” for the faith. The Greek word translated “contend” carries the connotation of intense effort or to struggle with all one’s might. It definitely has application in both the athletic arena and military battlefield. In other words, in the midst of growing spiritually, believers need to always be prepared to wholeheartedly “do battle” for the faith that has been passed on to them! Why? Because we live in a world that will constantly attack that faith, seek to discredit or pervert it.

By the way, it is important to know that the word faith used in this way means “*the body of truth as believed.*” For the Christian, this is the orthodox truths of the faith. So what Jude did was to take *time out* from his preferred teaching of spiritual content, to exhort his audience of believers to “contend” for the truth they had learned thus far. We must be prepared to do the same, or we will be overcome by such sweet-sounding admonitions as “be tolerant of others,” when, in fact, we are really to contend for the faith in the face of errors which attack it. Of course, we have already learned the caveat that this is on a case-by-case basis via a Biblically-informed mind.

Although Jude's short letter does mention the lost world in general, that is the perversion of Sodom and Gomorrah, notice how his main focus is on error that is showing up inside the church. Verses 4, 12, and 19 all mention *inside jobs!* ("Certain men have secretly slipped in among you. . ."; "These men are blemishes at your love feasts. . ."; and so on.)

Apparently, the Bishop Spongs of our day were active in Jude's day as well—the major difference is that they did not give interviews on MSNBC claiming to represent the Christian viewpoint!

I want to be careful that I don't give you the impression that we should simply be afraid or discouraged about these attacks. Instead, isn't it great to be in the middle of the action? For example, look at Verses 22-23:

*Be merciful to those who doubt; snatch others from the fire and save them;
to others show mercy, mixed with fear—hating even the clothing
stained by corrupted flesh.*

While the world is implementing Satan's strategy and is tangled up in a web of terrible error, the Christian should be in the middle of "snatching" lost individuals out of the kingdom of Satan and into the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. (See Colossians 1:13)

Of course, it is God who actually does the drawing and saving, but He has deemed it part of His plan to work through us—His ambassadors! And take note, we are going to hate some of the baggage these saved individuals bring with them, and we need to make sure we don't tolerate it within the fellowship for even a moment. No—it needs to go like stained clothing to be washed with the cleansing truth of God's Word.

And, as a final caution, the more we engage in the battle, the more we had better really, really keep our eyes on the Lord.

To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before His glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

In Closing

In closing, I hope you have been encouraged by this study and will seriously consider taking, as needed, the Biblical antidote for the so-called *tolerance* of our day. Specifically, my prayer is that you will always **contend** for the Biblical faith that is our heritage as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ!

Vistoso Community Church

OUR PURPOSE

The purpose of Vistoso Community Church
is to bring glory to God by completing
the work He has given us to do.

John 17:4

OUR MISSION

Our mission is to be used by God to help
the lost receive eternal life,
and those with eternal life to grow
in grace and knowledge.

OUR CORE VALUES

- Christ is the only Lord and Savior. Acts 2:36
- The Bible is the inspired word of God. II Timothy 3:16-17
- We honor God through traditional worship: Psalm 19:14
- Our loving fellowship strengthens us. Hebrews 10:24-25
- Seeking the lost is our commission. Matthew 28:19-20
- The principles of divine establishment are God given.
Nehemiah. 4:14



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