

Making peace in a pluralistic age

Matthew 5:7-9

Review

The Messiah defines the true nature of Kingdom life: The sermon on the Mount (5:1-7:29)

a. The character of Kingdom people (5:1-12)

1. Attitude toward self: humble hunger for righteousness (5:1-6)

2. Attitude toward others: passion for peace (5:7-9)

7 Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. 8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. 9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

- We are sinners (meek) living with sinners (merciful).
- There are three possible meanings to “pure in heart.”
 - 1. Moral purity**
 - 2. Motivational purity**
 - 3. Authentic on the inside**
- Reconciliation is at the core of what God is doing in our fallen world.

1. This stands in contrast to the perceptions of popular culture

7 Blessed are the **righteous judges**, for they shall not be judged.

8 Blessed are the **kosher in conduct**, for they shall see God.

9 Blessed are the **crusaders**, for they shall be called sons of God.

2. This stands in tension with vs.3-6

Vs. 3-6 emphasize righteousness

Vs. 7-9 emphasize reconciliation

- This tension is relieved by the Word of the Cross and by its merciful ambassadors. 2 Cor.5:18-21, Eph.2:13-16
- Christians and churches tend to emphasize either holiness or grace; and this can cause problems: on the one hand judgementalism and legalism or on the other a lack of orthodox boundaries.

3. This has been misunderstood. (three misunderstandings)

1. Pacifism and mercy should be applied on a national level to social and foreign policy more than to one's personal life.
2. Pacifism and mercy stand on their own as an ethical platform, apart from an orthodox view of the Cross of Christ.

3. Peace and mercy are to be sought at all costs with no moral or doctrinal boundaries.

4. What does tolerance mean? For more information on this topic go to apptoteach.org (theology files #703, #802, #803, #110)

1. Tolerance is one of the great virtues of postmodern culture. It has come to mean that we are supposed to accept every belief as true or worthy of respect. It dignifies any and every idea or value as an expression of the human spirit.

2. Some observations with respect to tolerance.

a. Three different kinds of tolerance must be distinguished.

1. **Legal toleration** commits us always to protect people's political rights to follow any religion or no religion at all.

2. **Social toleration** advocates charity toward people who think and believe differently from the way we do.

3. **Philosophical toleration** is the relativistic notion that one system of belief is as true as any other.

NOTE: Philosophical toleration is not necessarily demanded by legal and social toleration.

a. Pluralism does not demand that we all believe and behave the same way nor does it demand that we believe that any belief system is as good or true as another.

Illustration: Slavery is a part of social systems preferred by many groups throughout history. This does not mean that it is as right or good as other systems that promote human dignity and freedom. Christians believe that their view of truth and the world is not the only view but that it is the correct view. It is worth defending against all contrary views. Christians would argue for the rightness of their own view without fear of disrespecting the freedom of others to disagree.

b. Pluralism does demand that we practice legal and social toleration.

c. Evangelicals must embrace legal and social toleration without philosophical toleration.

d. They must also resist the tendency of their critics to tie philosophical intolerance to legal and social intolerance.

b. Is it not judgmental to judge those with restrictive moral and ideological beliefs? Does tolerance apply to all but those who have an absolute view of truth?

c. We all have certain "common sense" boundaries or limits on our pluralism. Most of us do not feel that Hitler's views or the views of

Muslim terrorists were simply moral preferences that deserve respect and should not be condemned.

- d. If you define religious belief as a “world and life view” held by faith, then you must label radical pluralism as a religious conviction.
3. Tolerance of legitimate differences is needed in seeking the truth.
 - a. “Nietzsche claimed that if men took God seriously, they would still be burning heretics at the stake.” Two types of people agree with this statement.
 1. **Ordinary bigots** – “That’s why we should burn heretics.”
 2. **Reactionaries** – “That’s why we should suppress the public expression of belief in God.”
 - b. Tolerance cannot be neutral about what is good, for its very purpose is to guard good and avert evils. What is tolerated depends upon what is viewed as the ultimate good or concern.
 - c. Tolerance is a moral virtue between the two vices of:
 1. **Soft-headedness** – We stand for little and fall for anything. When radical tolerance is the only virtue, we must dignify every form of human expression no matter how weird, as beautiful and noble.
 2. **Narrow mindedness** - We cannot see beyond our own preferences, which we mistakenly assume are also God’s standards.
 - d. Tolerance involves right judgment in the protection of ends against mistaken means.

ILLUSTRATION: Political conservatives and Liberals often share a common core goal (liberty and justice for all). They however have very different ideas as to how that goal is best reached and preserved. The danger is that the means of reaching the goal can be so closely identified with the goal itself that to challenge the means is to be understood as a challenge to the goal. Those who do not share our means to reach the goal we assume to be motivated by something other than reaching the goal. That “something other” is usually pretty ugly, selfish, and un-American.
 - e. Tolerance needs an ultimate concern as an end. It assumes a certain value system constructed around an ultimate goal.
 - f. Christians are to be legally and socially tolerant for four reasons.
 1. God does not want unwilling worship.
 2. We see in a glass dimly. I Cor.13:12
 3. We are all in process.
 4. There is a Biblical precedent for it in **Rom.14:5** “One man regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Let each man be fully convinced in his own mind.”

5. Guidelines for personal application

1. Respect the difference between legal, social and philosophical tolerance.
2. Recognize the dangers of both the pride of piety and also peace without the Cross.
3. Be sure that your commitment to the Kingdom includes a commitment to the King.
4. Give attention to the formation of a peacemaking spirit.
 - a. Start with the humility of a “poor spirit” that knows its own need for grace.
 - b. Cultivate an appreciation for the need and power of mercy in the lives of all people.
 - c. We cannot bring peace to a relationship if we do not have it working in our own hearts.

6. Conclusions

“Christians should be known as gracious, peacemakers without self-serving motives.”

“Christians arrive at that posture from a humble heart that freely finds its life in Christ by faith.”

“Kingdom people maintain a balanced respect for both holiness and grace. They have both a hunger for holiness and a passion for peace.”