

Rom. 14:19 So then let us follow after things which make for peace, and things whereby we may edify one another.

John 8:32 and ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.

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AM I AS INTOLERANT AS THE LORD?

by Jim Stauffer

Society presents a very confusing picture on the subject of tolerance. First we are told to be tolerant of many things such as abortion, homosexuality, etc., while at the same time many are so intolerant of what others think, they demonstrate against them sometimes violently.

When we consider tolerance from a biblical standpoint we are afforded guidelines by His word that enable us to know when to be tolerant and when to be intolerant. Jesus' comments about the strait gate and narrow way versus the broad way that leads to destruction indicates God will not be tolerant of those who choose worldliness over godliness.

Romans 14 teaches us to be tolerant of those who hold to personal practices in diet that are not commanded by God but would violate their conscience. We learn tolerance is directed at folks who are in the process of learning better. They need tolerance to encourage them to grow.

Yet Jesus says there will be no tolerance of deviation from God's word when He speaks through the apostle John, *"Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son."* (2 John 1:9) Paul offers no tolerance to the Galatians when they accept what he calls a perversion of the gospel in adding circumcision as a mandate for followers of Christ. He says they are to be accursed (Gal. 1:6-9).

It seems apparent some folks view tolerance as allowing a certain thing unilaterally. But tolerance is granting space where it was not originally granted. In machine work there is a tolerance that allows the equipment to function. But if that tolerance is increased the machine will fail.

Some seem to believe there is an attitude attached to tolerance. That is not to be the case. When we tolerate a weak brother, we are not tolerating sin. We are tolerant while he grows spiritually to understand how the mature child of God handles a given situation.

Biblical tolerance is not saying something is right. It is saying I understand you and I am willing to help you reach the point where what you believe and practice are in harmony with the Scriptures.

The Bible is the inerrant word of God. It is the judge of what we can and cannot tolerate and how that tolerance is to be accomplished. If we accept that we will not violate His word by tolerating things He does not tolerate.

THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS AT HAND

Luke begins the book of **Acts** with a brief summary of Jesus' activities after His resurrection: *"He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God."* There is no elaboration upon this statement anywhere in the gospels, the writers of such instead concluding their accounts with incidents that underscore the resurrection itself and the commission which Jesus gives to the apostles. However, the entirety of the gospel accounts should offer some insight into the things Jesus had to say *"pertaining to the kingdom of God"* because they each give some emphasis to the concept. What is interesting is the ongoing failure of the apostles to truly comprehend the meaning and nature of the kingdom of heaven, given that they had likely spent three years or so listening to Jesus preach regularly on the subject and surely discussing with Him the things they had heard. Therefore, as Jesus leads them to Bethany and commands them to wait in Jerusalem for the promised assistance of the Holy Spirit (**Acts 1:4-5**), it is both curious and yet not unexpected that they would ask, *"Lord, will You at that time restore the kingdom to Israel?"* (v.6). I would love to know, at that moment, what they were thinking about this *"kingdom of God."*

The Old Testament has much to say about the idea of God's coming king and kingdom as God used His spokesmen (the prophets) to foretell of His plans for

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such. The concepts of God ruling over His own people are rooted in the Mosaic covenant (**Ex.19.6**) and it appears that those of Israel who were faithful to the covenant recognized God as their King (**Judg.8.23; 1 Sam.8.5f; 12.6f**). However, with the establishment of a human monarchy in Israel and Judah, that concept appears to become misplaced. That is not to argue that God failed to remind His people of His rule. In fact, He insists by promise that He will again establish His throne and rule over His people. Most of these king/kingdom prophecies appear to center around two historical circumstances. First, during the glory years of David's reign, God promised David that his throne would be established forever, that his seed would sit upon that throne, would build a house for God and would be God's Son (**2 Sam.7.11-16**). As an inspired spokesman of God, David himself prophesies repeatedly about this coming king/kingdom (**Psalms 2; 22; 24; 29; 110**). And the initial fulfillment of the promise – Solomon – contributes to that body of work as well (**Psalms 72**). The second general time wherein the coming kingdom seems to be a point of focus is during the waning years of the nations of Israel and Judah, when their centuries of anarchy and faithlessness are met with the military domination of Assyria and Babylonia. While a number of prophets during this time refer to the glorious future of God's kingdom, it is in **Isaiah** and **Daniel** that such promises come into most sharp relief. In the shadow of national desolation, Isaiah and Daniel point the people to the days of the fourth empire (Babylonia being the first) wherein God would establish His eternal kingdom which will never be destroyed (**Dan.2.31-45**). Isaiah had already portrayed this rule/ruler in terms of splendor, righteousness, peace, forgiveness, judgment, victory, and dominion (**Isa.2.1f; 9.1f; 11.1f; 24.21f; 25.1f; 31-35; 40-45; 49-66**).

In these prophecies, along with many others declared by various OT prophets, God revealed much about this coming kingdom. Some of these facts can be stated thusly:
The King would be descended from David (**2 Sam.7.11f**)
The kingdom would be eternal (**2 Sam.7.11f; Dan.2.44**)
The King would be the Son of God (**2 Sam.7.11f; Psalm 2**)
The King would be a priest to God (**Ps.110**)
The King would be God (**Isa.9.6; 44.6; 52.7-53.12; Ps.110.1**)
The King would destroy His enemies (**Ps.2; 110; Isa.11.4,12f**)
The kingdom would be characterized by justice, righteousness, peace, forgiveness (**Isa.2.1f; 9.6f; 11.1f**)
The kingdom would be established during the Roman empire (**Dan.2.31f**)

While this list is not exhaustive, it does include some of the more prominent features of God's prophecies. But with such in mind, we return to the original question:

“What were the apostles thinking as they heard Jesus talk about the kingdom?” It is reasonable to assume that their messianic hopes were similar to those of the nation around them, and even a casual reading of the gospels indicates that their concepts were different than those being promoted by Jesus. While we appreciate the spiritual nature of these prophecies, we do so because we have the complete revelation of God's purpose and plans. But they did not have such, and in the absence of such spiritual insight, some of their apparent misconceptions are understandable. For the better part of six centuries, the Jewish people had been essentially a captive people, imprisoned to the military and political ambitions of the Babylonians and Persians and Greeks and Romans. And while they were not living in some distant captive land during most of that time, both secular history and biblical history make it clear that they often chafed at their lack of true independence. As an oppressed people, it would be reasonable to understand the prophecies of victory and dominion (**Ps.2; 110; Isa.11**) as promising a temporal/military kingdom.

As David had once conquered all around him, it is not hard to appreciate how they might interpret the promises of his descended king as being fulfilled in a purely physical and political way. After all, men are inclined to see in the Bible what we want to see and to emphasize some things to the exclusion, or at least neglect, of other things.

As Jesus is proclaiming the near approach of the kingdom while manifesting the miraculous powers of God, the messianic fervor in Palestine is obviously swelling. With such power at the head of a temporal army, what nation could hope to stand before them? Yet the manner and teaching of Jesus did not harmonize with this temporal/military expectation. And such was clearly confusing to the multitudes and to the apostles. He did not solicit the wealthy (**Matt.19.16f**), instead warning against the temptation of riches. His disciples had difficulty understanding this thinking (**v.25f**) – after all, who establishes a government without financial backing? He did not incite rebellion or guide the multitudes in some tactical training so that they would be prepared for the overthrow of the present powers. What king attracts thousands and thousands of followers and yet does not prepare them? In **Matt.11.1f**, even John the Baptist (imprisoned by Herod) appears to question the nature of Jesus' office. Jesus did not court the powerful politico-religious leaders of His day, though they had the potential to throw their influence behind His growing movement. Instead, He so enraged them that they instigated His murder. He simply didn't fit the picture of a king in the mold of David, raised by God to lead Israel to world dominion and glory.

However, He did emphasize the present reality of the kingdom of heaven and, eventually, of His position at its head. His teaching and preaching affirmed

consistently the reality and immediacy of the kingdom's advent (**Matt.5.3f; 8.10f; 18.3f; 21.23-44; Mark 12.28-34; Lk.14.15f; 17.20f; 19.11f; Jn.3:1f**). The vast majority of His parables are intended to reveal the true nature of the kingdom in order to correct the temporal misconceptions of the nation, and especially of His disciples (**Matt.13; 18.21f; 20.1f; 21.28f; 22.1f; 25.1f; Lk.12.16-32f; 13.24f; 16.1f; 17.20-18.8; 19.11f**; etc.). He argued that the miracles which He performed were proof of His victory over Satan, and thus proof of the present establishing of His kingdom (**Matt.12.24-29f; Lk.11.15-23**). And finally, after having been guided into all truth by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (**Acts 2.1-21**), the apostles boldly declare the enthronement of Jesus at the right hand of God in fulfillment of the prophecies concerning the royal seed of David (**Acts 2.29-36**). Blinded over the course of three years to the true nature of the kingdom, and inquiring to the very last day of Jesus' earthly existence, those men finally understood just Who Jesus really is, and what He came to do. He is God. He is the King. He came to rule. Even a cursory look at **Acts** will note that this kingdom reality dominated their preaching (**Acts 2.30f; 5.30-31; 8.12; 14.22; 17.6-7; 19.8; 20.25; 28.23,31**).

There are practical implications to these considerations – very powerful ones. First, the enthronement of God's King and emergence of His kingdom were not merely due to vagary or caprice in the unfolding of human history. This was no accident, no happenstance of circumstance. Instead, the rule of Jesus in fulfillment of dozens of prophecies serves as powerful – even overwhelming – evidence of the authority, reliability, and providence of God. God appeals to His ability to foretell the future and control the events of human history so as to prove His existence and power (**Isa.41.22f; 42.9f; 45.21**) and Peter reminded his readers of the supremacy of fulfilled prophecy to even that of the miraculous as evidence of the reliability of God's Word and promises (**2 Pet.1.13-21**). He is worthy of my faith. Secondly, the fulfillment of such prophecies should impress upon us the import of studying, understanding, and accepting the government of Jesus Christ. If God would spend hundreds of years planning, and Jesus would make such great effort instructing and then fulfilling the plans for His reign, then that rule must be important. And in fact, it is the eternal reign of God – now in the Messianic governance and finally in the Father's return to the throne (**1 Cor.15.24-28**) – that serves as the context of our redemption. We have been saved and sanctified so that we can participate in the eternal kingdom of God Almighty. And third, it is important to see the fulfillment of these prophecies in the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus because the spiritual reality of His reign and kingdom has once again been misconceived and dramatized by those who would pervert the truth of God. Premillennialism is little more than the reincarnation of the temporal yearnings of

ancient Israel.

The idea that God will come again and reign upon the earth for a thousand years stands opposed to almost all of the instruction of our Lord concerning the nature of His kingdom. True, the doctrine is dramatic and fantastic and appealing as it caters to our temporal yearnings, and especially in the thought that I have a second chance at salvation if I miss out on "the rapture" (a concept nowhere biblically accurate). But the Lord and His messengers made it clear in **Acts 2** that the kingdom was established at the enthronement of Jesus, and that anyone who chose then or chooses now to manifest faith in Jesus as Lord and Christ – King – may become a citizen of that kingdom.

The prophecies are fulfilled. The evidence is supplied. The power of God has been revealed. The Lord reigns. May we appreciate that truth, and all that it entails.

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Let's Think Things Through!

The Proverb writer, Solomon, said, "*A prudent man sees evil and hides himself. The naive proceed and pay the penalty.*" (**27:12**) Of course, the meaning is fairly self-evident, however, the prudent only knows to hide himself from evil because he has thought the situation through and seeing the outcome. We should all seek to be prudent men and women, so what we are going to do in the next several weeks is think through an hypothesis and see what the outcome of the truth or falsehood of the hypothesis will be. The hypothesis we will examine will be simply: If there is no God, then, what follows? What would be the logical outcome if there were no God?

Of course, the first outcome of the hypothesis would be: If there is no God, then God did not create the universe. A non-existent being cannot bring an actually existing object into being. This leads us to the obvious question of origins: How DID the Universe come into being? There are two and ONLY two options, neither of which is tenable scientifically. Either the Universe is eternal or the Universe created itself.

First, the Universe can't create itself. Only recently have men become so stupid as to actually believe this, even though they hypocritically contradict this by saying that as long as there is gravity then it is possible for the Universe to create itself (Stephen Hawking). That's like saying I am my own father!

Second, it is not eternal since the Laws of Thermodynamics indicate that all energy, given time, degenerates into heat and seeks equilibrium. The universe as we see it is both well-ordered and most definitely NOT in a state of equilibrium.

Clearly, the absence of God is not an option.

Cleveland Reddinger

Psa. 1:1 *Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the wicked, Nor standeth in the way of sinners, Nor sitteth in the seat of scoffers: 2 But his delight is in the law of Jehovah; And on his law doth he meditate day and night. 3 And he shall be like a tree planted by the streams of water, That bringeth forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also doth not wither; And whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. 4 The wicked are not so, But are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. 5 Therefore the wicked shall not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. 6 For Jehovah knoweth the way of the righteous; But the way of the wicked shall perish.*

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Sunday P.M. 5:00 Assembled Worship

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What Must I Do To Be Saved?

Hear the gospel - Romans 10:17

Believe in Jesus Christ - Hebrews 11:6

Repent of sins - Acts 17:30

Confess Christ as Lord - Romans 10:9,10

Be Baptized for remission of sins - Acts 2:38

Be Faithful unto death - Revelation 2:10