

## The Faith of Toleration

*By Todd Chandler*

Right and wrong...Less and less people like to think in those terms, or listen to those who do. The business of drawing lines is risky and a quick way to get labeled judgmental, self-righteous, or hateful. So, a more peaceful option becomes popular. The faith of right and wrong becomes the faith of toleration – don't do it, but don't condemn it.

In a culture in love with tolerance, Christians had best make a periodic evaluation of their own faith. This test can begin with two foundation questions: 1) Do I know what is right? 2) Am I willing to stand against things that are not right?

Can we know right and wrong? “And you shall do what is right in the sight of the Lord” (Deut. 6:18). “He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him – the word that I have spoken” (John 12:48). “You shall know the truth” (8:32a). It is God who dictates right and wrong, period. And God clearly believes His revelation is sufficient for us to know His will. This article assumes the answer to, “Can we understand God's will?” is a firm, “Absolutely!” My personal discernment of right, then, is not a question of what is possible to know, but of my personal knowledge of God's truth; “those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Heb. 5:14).

Am I willing to stand for God's truth? Now, that is an entirely different question. There only is one option: “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them” (Eph 5:11). God requires more than a refrain from sin; He requires that we expose it. And exposure demands a clear identification of wrong things as wrong. If I claim to stand for truth, I must expose what is wrong. God leaves no alternative.

Often we have the bad habit of referring to sin as “weakness,” “poor judgment,” or “a mistake.” Those qualities may be involved, but works of darkness are more; they are *sin*. And sin carries the horrific consequence of death (Isa. 59:2; Rom 6:23). When it comes to sin we must call it what it is, and speak with enough volume that others hear the message (Ezek. 3:18-19). We know what God thinks of those who refuse to stand against sin (Rev. 2:13-14, 20-21).

It is wise to consider that exposing sin does not justify boorish arrogance. Truth is abrasive enough without putting my own bad attitude or personality into the mix. Too often, sinful words have been justified by claiming to stand for truth. Paul instructed Timothy to be, “gentle to all...patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition” (2 Tim. 2:24-25). And, there are such things as foolish disputes to avoid (2 Tim. 2:23). It is the mature, wise Christian

who can balance these two principles without compromising a firm stand for truth.

Knowing the effects of sin, why ever would we fail to expose it? First, we know other people do not want us to say things are wrong. Our culture is more tolerant of evil every week, and less accepting of censure. The effect within the church is predictable, especially among younger Christians. They have been fed a diet of toleration from Sesame Street through college. They have heard often that truth is elusive and individual, rather than objective and knowable (John 8:32), and to tell them a worship practice is wrong is almost unthinkable. So, leaders cower and take the peaceful path to destruction; they may refuse to do it, but they will not condemn it. It only is a matter of time until that church or home accepts the sin.

Second, we fail to expose sin because we simply do not know what is right or wrong in the first place. Years of neglectful Bible study make frail weaklings who get pushed around by every new idea that comes through an Internet post, book or fad. The Holy Spirit describes such people as, “unskilled in the word...a babe.” (Heb. 5:13). When Christians are too infantile to recognize sin, churches and homes are in great danger indeed.

So sin runs amuck. Maybe not in the grotesque, offensive ways of a brothel or pagan temple, but in its polite progression sin seeps into churches and homes. Failure to identify sin as sin leaves God’s kingdom undefended, and both the watchmen and the citizens will be consumed (Ezek. 33:6). Before long, Christians not only refuse to condemn sin, they begin to condemn those who do oppose sin. Christians will fall, souls will perish, the light of the word will dim, families will be broken, churches will depart the faith, God will be forsaken all because someone fell for Satan’s great compromise, “You don’t have to do it, but don’t tell others they are wrong.” Enough!

If God has a will, and if God has made that will knowable, and if things opposed to His will are rightly called sin, we must say so. Let us refuse to sin, and then expose it for what it is! Remember what is at stake and,

- Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, great and awesome, and fight for your brethren, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses” (Neh. 4:14).
- Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong (1 Cor 16:13).
- “Be strong for our people and for the cities of our God” (2 Sam 10:12)
- Stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God (Col 4:12).
- Stand firm and hold to the traditions you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us (2 Thess. 2:15).