

"How to Be Intolerant Like a Christian"

Psalm 14

Introduction

- In [Lewis Carroll's](#) *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, one of the characters, a Dodo bird, suggests the idea of a race to solve the problem of being wet. Listen to what Carroll writes. "First [the Dodo] marked out a race-course, in a sort of a circle ("the exact shape doesn't matter," it said), and then all the party were placed along the course, here and there. There was no "One, two, three, and away," but they began running when they liked, and left off when they liked, so that it was not easy to know when the race was over. However, when they had been running half-an-hour or so, and were quite dry again, the Dodo suddenly called out, "The race is over!" and they all crowded round it, panting, and asking, "But who has won?" This question the Dodo could not answer without a great deal of thought, and it sat for a long time with one finger pressed upon its forehead, (the position in which you usually see Shakespeare, in the pictures of him), while the rest waited in silence. At last the Dodo said "Everybody has won, and all must have prizes."¹
- You and I know the Dodo by another name. The Dodo's other name is Tolerance. We live in a day and age where Tolerance is one of the most coveted virtues there is. As [John Stott](#) explains, "there are at least three different kinds of tolerance. First, there is legal tolerance: fighting for the equal rights before the law of all ethnic and religious minorities. Christians should be in the forefront of this campaign. Second, there is social tolerance, going out of our way to make friends with adherents of other faiths, since they are God's creation who bear his image. Third, there is intellectual tolerance. This is to cultivate a mind so broad and open as to accommodate all views and reject none."² This last one is our Dodo. In our day and age this last kind of Tolerance is the chief of all virtues. This Tolerance calls the shots. This Tolerance forces us to say "what's true for you—is great, but it's not necessarily true for me." This Tolerance says there are no moral absolutes. This Tolerance says that truth is what our friends let us get away with.³ This Tolerance lines up all religions next to each other and proclaims all equal because they lead to the same place. This Tolerance proudly proclaims that no one has a lock hold on truth. And to be called intolerant is the chief of all insults.
- Tolerance is behind comments like these. *New York Times* columnist [Thomas Freidman](#) writes, "It is urgent that the different religions 'reinterpret' their traditions to embrace modernity and pluralism and to create space for secularism and alternative faiths."⁴ Or, in an article in the *Chicago Tribune*, [Bishop C. Joseph Sprague](#) of the United Methodist Church's Northern Illinois Conference says, "I am always fearful when we in the Christian community move beyond the rightful claim that Jesus is

¹ Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, (New York: William Morrow, 1866), 33-34.

² John Stott, "Why Don't They Listen?" interview by Gary Barnes, *Christianity Today*, (September 2003), p. 51

³ Douglas Groothuis, *Truth Decay*, p. 20.

⁴ Thomas Freidman, *The New York Times*, 27 November 2001.

decisive for us, to the presupposition that non-Christians...are outside God's plan of salvation. That smacks of a kind of non-Jesus like arrogance."⁵ The message is clear. Be tolerant or else.

- Like the Dodo and his race, Tolerance marks out the racecourse of life but the shape of the course doesn't really matter. Tolerance suggests we run, but where or when or how doesn't matter either. Tolerance calls out when the race is over but it cannot say who has won the race. The most it can say, in fact, the only thing it can say is that everybody wins. There are no losers. All receive prizes. And so, just like Carroll's story of Alice and the Dodo, the consequence of running at Tolerance's whim is that the game itself becomes meaningless.
- The way of Tolerance is meaningless. It leads nowhere. "*Meaningless! Meaningless!*" says the Teacher.⁶ It is absurd. Tolerance is not a virtue. In the words of G.K. Chesterton, "Tolerance is the virtue of the man without convictions." Or, in slightly different words, Tolerance is the virtue of the man without meaning.

Transition

As we continue our series through the Psalms called *The Songs of Life*, I want to suggest to you this morning that God is unmistakably and absolutely intolerant of meaninglessness. He's intolerant of Tolerance. Here's the reason why. The Big Idea of Psalm 14 is that...

Proposition

- **God is continually and actively involved in all of creation for his specific purpose of saving people from their sins**
- God's testimony is that there is meaning in life but only insofar as life intersects with His specific involvement in the world. In the name of Tolerance, to say that all religions are true means that no religion is true. It's the Dodo's race. It's a recipe for meaninglessness. "Either Christianity is true for all people, or it is true for no one."⁷ The only way to bring [all religions] under one umbrella [the umbrella of Tolerance] is to deny their distinctive teaching."⁸ And this is God cannot do. He is intolerant of that kind of Tolerance. How are we to be intolerant like a Christian? We are to intolerantly deny that there is no absolute meaning in life. There is. We are to intolerantly deny that all paths lead to the same place. All paths don't lead to the same place. We are to intolerantly deny the claim that there are no moral absolutes. There are moral absolutes. We are to be absolutely intolerant on these issues. The way to be intolerant in our day and age is to suggest that there is a God who has some authority in our lives and that we are accountable to him. We are called to affirm, reaffirm, and remind the world, with deep conviction, that God has acted. That He has spoken. That he is **continually and actively involved in all of creation for his specific purpose of saving people from their sins.**

⁵ Bishop C. Joseph Sprague, *Chicago Tribune*, Associated Press, 19 November 1991.

⁶ Ecclesiastes 1:2

⁷ *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, p. 929.

⁸ Joseph Stowell, *The Problem With Jesus*, p. 25.

- That's the message of Psalm 14. It's the message that drives our world bonkers. As [David Wells](#) says, "The truth is that the public dimension of our chrome and plastic world, our cities with their high rises and high rents, admits to no interest in the divine presence, seeks no grace, and asks for no forgiveness. It looks to pluralism [or Tolerance] as the way out of this awkward dilemma. Let the citizens take care of their relationships to God as private individuals, each in his or her own way, if this is what they wish to do, but let the rest of the world remain free of ranting about God, the supernatural, and moral absolutes."⁹

Transition

That is what we are here to intolerantly do this morning. I'm being facetious now. Rant about God, the supernatural, and moral absolutes. Turn in your bibles to Psalm 14. Listen to verse 1 and God's answer to Tolerance.

Main Points

- Again, [verse 1](#). *The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no one who does good.* Verse 1 is not about atheism—although atheism is foolishness. Biblically speaking, when the Old Testament uses the word fool it's used as a description of the person who has relegated God to the sidelines of life. The fool is the one who says that God is irrelevant. God is not important. As [Robert Davidson](#) says, "The fool is not a simpleton. He may be highly intelligent, but in the eyes of the psalmist he is a person who hasn't a clue what life is really about. In his thinking he has banished God to the sidelines of the universe."¹⁰ "The fool is one whose life is lived without the direction or acknowledgement of God."¹¹ He lives life as if there is no God. The 21st century man of Tolerance is the Old Testament fool repackaged. He's got new clothes and a new hairstyle but he's still the same Old Fool. The man of Tolerance looks around and sees that nothing is wrong, that everything is permissible. He cannot fathom that there might be a God who's involved in creation, who's spoken, who has some authority in our lives and that we are accountable to him.
- The fool's life is a recipe for meaninglessness. God is intolerant of meaninglessness. God's testimony is that there is meaning in life. **God is continually and actively involved in all of creation for his specific purpose of saving people from their sins.** And meaning is found as life intersects with His specific involvement in the world. And so God's first words in response to the lifestyle of the man of Tolerance are that he does not tolerate our human condition as Fools. He is intolerant of the fact that we are, look at the three verbal phrases in [verse 1](#), *corrupt, vile, we do no good*. And if we object and say, "But I'm not a fool, I'm not corrupt or vile. I do good." To all of us God says, "Do you really? Look into the recesses of your own heart. What does your conscience tell you? What does the evening news reveal about your goodness?"

⁹ David Wells, *God in the Wasteland*, p. 10.

¹⁰ Davidson, p. 54.

¹¹ Craigie, p. 147.

What do your newspapers report of your moral uprightness? What do your thoughts reveal about your incorruptibility?

- You see the reason God cannot tolerate our human condition is because he is not a "disinterested spectator."¹² **God is continually and actively involved in all of creation.** Look at **verse 2.** *The LORD looks down from heaven on the sons of men.* The world is not governed by chance or by fate because God is an absentee God. God is not some distant far off God whose vision is myopic. The world is preserved and governed by a God who sees, who knows, who rules, who works, who directs, who breaks into this world and acts.¹³ Psalm 103:19 *The LORD has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all.* Psalm 33:14-15 *from his dwelling place [God] watches all who live on earth-- 15 he who forms the hearts of all, who considers everything they do.* God is continually and actively involved in all of life. "The presumption is that if we cannot identify God's presence in the world, if we cannot with boldness and certainty say what God is "doing," and unless what God is doing meets with the approval of modernity, then it must be the case that he has been doing nothing, that he is absent."¹⁴ And nothing could be farther from the truth.
- Instead, God looks down from heaven and declares that what's missing, what's wrong is not a mental deficiency but a lack of understanding.¹⁵ **Verses 2-3.** *The LORD looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. 3 All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one.* "The fool is not a rare subspecies within the human race; all human beings are fools apart from the wisdom of God."¹⁶ We all lack understanding. Apart from God, we all are morally deficient. Without God our priorities in life are entirely wrong. *We all have turned aside. We are all corrupt. There is no one who does good, not even one.* Left to ourselves, none of us act wisely. There is no wisdom apart from God. The one thing our culture simply cannot fathom is that there is a God who looks down from heaven and has something to say about how we live.
- This is the one message, the only message that Christianity has to offer—that there is something horribly wrong with all of us, that we are in deep need of something—and that God offers a solution. Tolerance says there is no solution. Tolerance has no answer to the problem of evil. For instance, the evil of 9/11. If in the marketplace of ideas all positions are valid and equal then who's to say that flying planes into towers is wrong? What about the evil of genocide that is happening right under our noses in Sudan? If in the marketplace of ideas, all faiths are equally valid and lead to the same place then who are we to stop the systematic extermination of a group of people? Tolerance has no answer to these questions let alone the evil of our own hearts. With

¹² Davidson, p. 54.

¹³ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 165.

¹⁴ Wells, p. 184.

¹⁵ Craigie, p. 147-8.

¹⁶ Craigie, p. 148.

Tolerance calling the shots, all that is left is meaninglessness and folly. Life with Tolerance at the helm is the race of the Dodo. The game itself becomes meaningless.

- Again, the biggest difference between Christianity and every other path that leads to God is that not only does Christianity give a comprehensive explanation of evil—an explanation that corresponds to reality and experience—but it gives the solution. **God is continually and actively involved in all of creation for his specific purpose of saving people from their sins.** The solution is God's salvation. God's intolerance of our condition means that he has acted to reverse that condition. Look at [verse 7](#). *Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion! When the LORD restores the fortunes of his people, let Jacob rejoice and Israel be glad!* The psalmist David anticipated the day when God would intolerantly deal with the problem of evil by providing a solution. He looked forward to the time when God would send Christ. I love how [David Wells](#) puts it. "The cross prefigures the day when all that is wrong, all that has defiled life, all that has mocked and defied God will be put forever on the scaffold and truth will be put forever on the throne. It is a bell tolling softly for the proud and arrogant, the defilers of life and the disobedient toward God, a reminder of God's certain judgment to come. God's abandonment of Christ foreshadowed the coming abandonment of those who have not found in his death their security. And God's judgment on his son is the shadow of the executioner's ax that will surely drop on all that is morally dark, including the kingdom of dark powers from which it originates."¹⁷ All thoughts about God's continual activity in the world must be thoughts about Christ, for he is the architect of that activity, he is the origin, center, and goal.¹⁸ It is through the incomparable Christ that God sets us free from the law of sin and death—from the life of folly.¹⁹ *Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.*²⁰

Conclusion

- In his book *The Everlasting Man* [G.K. Chesterton](#) says this about Christianity in comparison with all other paths to God. "In truth the Church is too unique to prove herself unique. For most popular and easy proof is by parallel; and here there is no parallel."²¹ Tolerance tries to parallel the message of Christianity with every other message out there. But it can't be done. And we are to intolerantly insist that there is something unique and different and wonderful about what God says to this world through Christ.
- In [C.S. Lewis'](#) *The Last Battle* the free beasts of Narnia are held sway by the words of an ape named Shift who deceives the beasts with the talk of Tolerance. His goal is to make them slaves of the Calormenes and their god Tash. When the free beasts begin

¹⁷ Wells, p. 170.

¹⁸ Wells, p. 163.

¹⁹ Romans 8:2

²⁰ Hebrews 9:27-8.

²¹ G.K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man*, p. 85.

to question Shift and remind him that they serve Aslan the lion and not Tash, Shift responds with words that sound all too familiar nowadays. Listen.

- "What is it now?" said the Ape. "Be quick." "Please," said the Lamb, "I can't understand. What have we to do with the Calormenes? We belong to Aslan. They belong to Tash. They have a god called Tash. They say he has four arms and the head of a vulture. They kill Men on his altar. I don't believe there's any such person as Tash. But if there was, how could Aslan be friend with him?" All the animals cocked their heads sideways and all their bright eyes flashed toward the Ape. They knew it was the best question anyone had asked yet. The Ape jumped up and spat at the Lamb. "Baby!" he hissed. "Silly little bleater! Go home to your mother and drink milk. What do you understand of such things? But the others listen. Tash is only another name for Aslan. All that old idea of us being right and the Calormenes being wrong is silly. We know better now. The Calormenes use different words but we all mean the same thing. Tash and Aslan are only two different names for you know Who. That's why there can never be any quarrel between them. Get that into your heads, you stupid brutes. Tash is Aslan: Aslan is Tash."²² The message of Christianity is unique. Christ is not Tash. Don't be deceived by the shifting words of Tolerance. *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16 For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. 17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.* Let's pray.

²² C.S. Lewis, *The Last Battle*, p. 39-40.