

Question: Why do Christians think that Christianity is the only valid religion? Why can't they be more tolerant of other world religions?

Unfortunately, there are many intolerant people in our world today. But a misconception in today's pluralistic world assumes that holding any definite conviction means one is "intolerant" of anyone who believes something different. We should make a distinction between having strong convictions about certain truth claims and being intolerant of people who may believe differently. For example, to believe that the earth is a round ball will not allow me to accept the belief of some people that the earth is flat. The earth is flat or it is round; it cannot be both. However, this does not mean that round-earth people are intolerant of flat-earth people. Even though they may attempt to persuade the flat-earth people to believe their truth claim, round-earth people can allow the flat-earth people the right to believe and live as though the earth is flat.

If many of the claims of Christianity are true, the opposing claims of other world religions cannot also be true. For example, the Christian Bible teaches that there is only one God and that we should not make idol gods and bow down to them (Exodus 20:1-6). If this is true, any claim that denies this God's existence and accepts the existence of other gods or manufactures idol gods to worship cannot be valid. Also, Jesus said: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). If Jesus is the way to God the father, then any religion that openly rejects this claim cannot be valid. The very nature of these and other truth claims will not allow us to believe that all world religions are equally valid.

However, religious intolerance is more than disagreeing on truth claims. Intolerance usually expresses varying degrees of hostility towards anyone who believes differently or who may approve of those who are different religiously. This hostility may be expressed by an unholy discrimination against those with whom they disagree. It may take the form of "jokes" that make fun of what others believe, social shunning, hateful gossip, and/or outright malicious statements or actions. Intolerance is also shown when any religious group—Christian, Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist or other—attempts to use force to deny another group the right to exist. On the other hand, to engage in honest and open discussion of our differences is not intolerance. If anyone believes

certain truth claims, he should have every right to present his views and even attempt to persuade others to believe them. But to pass laws or threaten imprisonment and death for anyone who believes and practices a different religion is intolerance.

Jesus made some very clear truth claims (Read the Gospel of John.), but he was also tolerant and kind toward those who did not accept his claims. Although some walked away in unbelief, Jesus never belittled them or attempted to force them to believe what he taught (Mark 10:17-22; John 6:60-66). This did not mean he approved of what everyone said or did, but Jesus always respected each person's right to think for himself. He did warn of consequences that could come because of their rejection of truth; but he was always compassionate, kind, gentle, patient and willing to "bear with others" (Colossians 3:11-14), even in their sins.

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