

“Tolerance”  
Mark 9:38-43  
(Preached at Trinity, September 26, 2012)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. What is the greatest sin? It would seem that in our modern culture one sin has risen above all others. Everything else can be overlooked and forgiven but not this. I’m talking about the sin of intolerance.
2. We live in a day in which tolerance has become one of the highest virtues of our society. Diversity is worshipped and every person and every idea is to equally received and given equal acceptance.  
Political correctness has risen to new heights. In the name of tolerance children are being taught that every lifestyle choice is equally valid. No one has the right to impose their convictions upon someone else because we live in a day where there are no absolutes, only personal opinions and personal convictions and personal choices. Everyone’s beliefs and choices are equally valid. In fact, today if you speak out against some actions that God clearly labels as sin it is called hate speech.
3. While we are justified in recoiling against such hyper-tolerance where no one’s opinions or choices are to be questioned, we must be careful not to throw out the Christian virtues of love, forbearance, patience, and gentleness. We must guard against a critical spirit that is judgmental and censorious.
4. Tonight we are going to see a passage where the disciples of Christ manifest a position of intolerance and Jesus corrects them. It is important for us to look at this carefully.
5. Last time we began to look at the disciples’ problem with pride – the same problem that every human being has. As they were on their way to Capernaum they had been talking about which of them were the greatest.  
The word used (διαλέγομαι) can carry the idea of an argument, a dispute – ESV, NIV, CSV – argued. KJV, NKJV - disputed
6. Jesus corrected their thinking by turning the whole subject upside down.  
**Mark 9:35 NAU** - "He called the twelve and said to them, "If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all."  
  - a. Those who are greatest in the Kingdom of God are those who are meek and humble.
  - b. God was mindful of the humility of Moses.  
**Numbers 12:3 KJV** - "(Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth.)"
  - c. Pride raises its ugly head in many different ways. Self-advancement is often motivated by pride. This was the issue here with the disciples. This is in contrast to the humble Christian that simply places himself in the service of Christ.
  - d. Intolerance and a hyper-critical spirit also stems from a heart of pride where, again, we set ourselves above others.

7. As we come to **Verse 38** we find John speaking. It is the only place in Mark where John takes a solo role. Perhaps he was the chief instigator in the argument about rank. It's as if he is trying to change the subject. Surely it was embarrassing and painful when they found out Jesus knew about their dispute as to who would be greatest. John probably figured this would be a good time to move to a different point of discussion.
- a. The situation regarding the demon possessed boy was still fresh on their minds. They continued to be amazed at the power and authority of Christ. They were probably also troubled over their weakness and inability to cast out the demon.
  - b. John turns our Lord's attention to another situation of demon possession and how they had seen someone else casting out demons in the name of Christ who wasn't a part of their group.
  - c. Jesus once again goes into teaching mode and corrects their faulty understanding.
8. Tonight I want us to look at this subject of tolerance and then briefly balance it with the need to be unwavering at times and to clearly understand the distinction.
- I. The importance of tolerance (which may seem strange considering my intro)
- A. There are endless opinions and choices we can make that are matters of liberty
    1. On one hand all things are moral  
**1 Corinthians 10:31 NAU** - "Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."  
 Everything we do should be with a heart towards God. He should be at the center of everything in our lives.
    2. On the other hand, God has given us great liberty as we live for His glory.
      - a. Do you buy a Ford or a Chevy? New or used?
      - b. There are countless ways a married couple may structure their home. Who carries out the trash? Who pays the bills? What time do the kids go to bed? How do you conduct family devotion? And countless decisions;  
 Do you breastfeed. Do you homeschool? Natural or epidural? Does the wife work?
    3. What if someone chooses a path different from the one you have chosen?
  - B. We must guard against a censorious, judgmental spirit
    1. The chief fruit of our conversion is love – this should change everything
    2. 1 Cor. 13 speaks much on this
      - a. **Verse 4** – Love produces humility. Humility lifts up his brother  
**Philippians 2:3-4 NAS** - "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; <sup>4</sup> do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others."  
**1 Corinthians 13:4 NAU** - "love does not brag *and* is not arrogant,"  
**Verse 5** - " it does not seek its own"  
 A judgmental heart is almost always a proud heart
      - b. **Verse 5** - "does not take into account a wrong *suffered*,"  
 KJV is a much more literal translation here and gets to the heart  
 "thinketh no evil" - οὐ λογίζεται τὸ κακόν

- (1) A critical spirit is the disposition to think evil of others.
  - (2) The hyper-critical person is continually judging others. They tend to overlook the good and focus only on the negative.
  - (3) They continually question the motives of others. They seldom put themselves in the position of others.  
Old proverb: "Don't judge another man until you've walked a mile in his shoes."
- c. **Verse 7** - "believes all things" – In other words, love brings us to think the best of others, even when they don't think exactly like we do.

## II. So let's look at the text before us tonight

- A. What do we know about this man John has condemned?
1. He wasn't merely an exorcist – he wasn't a fraud. He was casting out the demons in the "name of Jesus"  
The expression "In Your name" implies by the authority of Christ
  2. We shouldn't miss the irony here.
    - a. The disciples had earlier found themselves helpless before a particular demon.  
**Mark 9:18 NAU** - "I told Your disciples to cast it out, and they could not *do it*."
    - b. This apparently bothered them.  
**9:28 NAU** - "Why could we not drive it out?"  
\*\* Was it a blow against their pride?
    - c. Now we find this outsider doing what they had been unable to do. He was successful where they had failed
    - d. Was it pride that led the disciples to condemn this man?
  3. Jesus doesn't condemn him in the sense of **Matt. 7:22**  
**Matthew 7:22-23 NAS** - "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' <sup>23</sup> "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'"
    - a. In all likelihood he was a true follower of Christ; a true believer. He had probably heard the teaching of Jesus and believed, although he had not yet developed a relationship with the other disciples.
    - b. Notice their attempt to stop him had apparently failed:  
The verb tense either implies ongoing efforts to stop him or an unsuccessful attempt. The NASB is accurate.  
**Mark 9:38 NAU** - "we tried to prevent him because he was not following us."
    - c. You can't stop a true believer from following Christ, from serving Christ. This man was declaring the dominion and authority of Christ.

3. On thing we know for sure. He was casting out demons and John and the rest of the apostles did not approve.

a. He wasn't a part of their group. He wasn't an insider and so he was to be rejected.

**Mark 9:38 NAU** - "we tried to prevent him because he was not following us."

I find it interesting John says, "He was not following us."

b. How alive this cliquish spirit continues to be in the church of Christ today. Someone not exactly like us is to be rejected. This is a particular danger in a small church like ours with a very limited demographic.

**James 2:1-4 NAU** - "My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with *an attitude of personal favoritism*.<sup>2</sup> For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes,<sup>3</sup> and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, "You sit here in a good place," and you say to the poor man, "You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool,"<sup>4</sup> have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives?"

**Romans 14:10 NAU** - "But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God."

c. How we must guard against a competitive attitude with other Christians.

D. Jesus condemns their attitude

**Mark 9:39-40 NAU** - "Do not hinder him, for there is no one who will perform a miracle in My name, and be able soon afterward to speak evil of Me.<sup>40</sup> "For he who is not against us is for us."

1. We have to put this into context. There are many today who give a minor nod towards Jesus. They would not profess to be "against" Christ. In reality they are His enemies. They know nothing about our Lord's demand for discipleship.

2. This man knows the dominion of Christ over all and is manifesting this dominion calling upon His name in conquering demons.

3. He is also clearly siding with Christ in an atmosphere of hatred towards Him by the religious leaders. To side with Christ was to be thrown out of the Temple. The Pharisees had already declared their rejection of Christ.

**Mark 3:22 NAS** - "And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, "He is possessed by Beelzebul," and "He casts out the demons by the ruler of the demons."

4. Would a false believer take such bold action in a world hostile to Christ? Would a pretender boldly speak the name of Christ on a street corner in Iran?

5. It is also true that a culture that isn't against Christ always proves to be beneficial to the advancement of the Gospel. We don't live in a Christian culture, but we enjoy the liberties to share Christ.  
When Paul heard that there were some preaching the Gospel from impure motives, even seeking to cause him distress he stated:  
**Philippians 1:18 NAU** - "What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice"
- E. The chief point our Lord is making is we should be tolerant of other believers who may not exactly like us or a part of our group.

But this leads us to another important point in this equation. While we must guard against a censorious spirit; while we must be cautious about rejecting others because they are not just like us; while we must exercise humility, tolerance, patience, and forbearance, we must also be dogmatic in matters of the truth of the Gospel.

## II. The necessity of conviction

- A. Christianity is a very narrow religion
  1. The Bible declares all human beings to be under the wrath of God
  2. The Bible declares Jesus Christ as the only way of salvation
  3. Only Christians are going to heaven. People may declare this to be hateful and intolerant.
- B. The Gospel is narrow. It is definite. It is certain.
  1. Paul declared great curses upon any who would attempt to change it in any way.  
**Galatians 1:8 NAU** - "But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!" - ἀνάθεμα
  2. This seems overly dogmatic to some. It seems intolerant. Christianity IS dogmatic.
  3. The Bible is not a Book of suggestions or opinions. It is a book to be taught in command mode.
- C. When we speak of tolerance we are not speaking of compromising the truth
  1. We must be wise to know the difference between tolerance and compromise.
  2. We must know the difference between the essentials and non-essentials. We must know the areas of liberty and the areas we must submit to with absolute obedience.

## Conclusion:

1. May God grant us to look at other Christians as our brothers and sisters—that we are all a part of the same body; that we are one.
2. We are not in competition with one another. If others are prospering then the Kingdom is prospering and we are prospering. We must guard against selfish ambition in our Christian service.  
**Mark 9:35 NAU** - "If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all."