

Liberty Commentary July 21, 2008

A recent survey conducted by the Pew forum on Religion and public life found that the vast majority of “religious” Americans have set aside the “old time religion dogma” and no longer believe that their religion is the only way to eternal life.

What was particularly interesting in this survey is that those who classified themselves as evangelicals (such as myself), 57 percent believed that many different religions could lead to eternal life. In total, 70 percent of those who claimed a religious affiliation believe that there are many different ways to obtain eternal life.

What is particularly striking about the fact that 57 percent of evangelicals believe that many roads lead to heaven is that traditionally evangelicals have believed in the inerrancy of scripture, the virgin birth of Jesus Christ and the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the only means of forgiveness of sins.

Rev. Tom Reese, a fellow at the Woodstock Theological Center at Georgetown University says, “what most people are saying is, hey, we don’t have a hammer lock on God or salvation and God’s bigger than us and we should respect that and respect other people. Some people are like butterflies that go from flower to flower, going from religion to religion—and frankly they don’t get that deep into any of them”.

Sadly, I believe Mr. Reese may be correct in his assessment. We live in a society that espouses tolerance and we want to be viewed as open-minded, enlightened and inclusive of all religions. As a result we dispense with the notion that there are moral and spiritual absolutes derived from God that transcend human philosophy and reasoning. Consequently, many churches and “Christians” have adopted this mind set of openness and tolerance and are no longer

willing to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ as the only means of obtaining eternal life.

It is important to note that Christians (those who have come to faith in Christ) are the most tolerant people on the face of the earth. Jesus was tolerant of all people. Jesus engaged the Samaritan woman at the well in a conversation when it was not customary for the Jews to speak with the Samaritans. Jesus had compassion when the Jews brought a woman to Jesus who was taken in the very act of adultery and Jesus forgave her. Jesus reattached the ear of Malchus after Peter severed his ear with a sword when Judas brought the mob to arrest Jesus. As Jesus was hanging on the cross Jesus said, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." Jesus is the epitome of tolerance.

Even though Jesus was tolerant He always spoke the truth in love and did not waver from His statements no matter how unpopular he was with his own countrymen. Jesus infuriated the Jews with His claims that He was equal with God in nature, power and authority. Jesus makes a very dogmatic statement in John 14:6 regarding eternal life. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me". Jesus tells Nicodemus in John 3:3, "except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God". The Apostle John writes, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."

Jesus was tolerant, but He stood for something even though it made Him unpopular and cost Him his life. We too should exhibit tolerance and love for those who have different religious views and perspectives, but at the same time we must stand for the truth and integrity of the Word of God that clearly states that faith in Jesus Christ is the only way to receive eternal life.

In reality Jesus was a divider not a uniter. Jesus tells his disciples that “they will put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me”.

The road to heaven is actually exclusive, not inclusive of all belief systems and all religions. According to the Word of God only those who receive Christ as their Savior by faith receive eternal life. That is dogmatic, that is narrow, that is offensive, that is divisive, but that is the Word of God and either we accept it as truth and apply it to our lives and allow it to transform our lives into the very character of Jesus Christ or we must set it on a shelf and consider it just another book of great poetry, history, and philosophy that really doesn't mean what it says.

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