

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Why Biblical Christianity Is Intolerant in an Age of Tolerance

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

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Well as you know we have taken a bit of a break from our study of the Gospel of Luke. I had a time of rest and we came back and we had the Shepherd's Conference, and that was followed soon by our celebration of the resurrection. And we haven't gotten back to the Gospel of Luke yet but we will next Lord's Day morning. And, as I said, next Lord's Day evening we'll start a study of 1 John. I think we'll start next Sunday. That's what my plan is at this point. So we have some great things ahead of us and I'm very very anxious to get back into the Gospel of Luke. But these interim times have given us an opportunity to emphasize some things that are very very important and to speak directly to some of the issues that we face as Christians in our world today.

I had the opportunity, of course, to speak a number of times at the Shepherd's Conference here just a few weeks ago and then to travel the next week down to Florida to speak at the Ligonier Conference. A number of people have prevailed upon me to tell you what I spoke at the conference and down in Florida as well. Because the message that I gave there is a pertinent and important one for us of us to understand. I spoke on the subject of why biblical Christianity is intolerable in an age of tolerance? Nobody would argue that we live in an age of tolerance. But it seems to me that the one thing that's intolerable is the biblical gospel, true Christian message. And it's important for us to understand why. And so that was what I gave in these various conferences. People have said, "Well you need to tell the whole church what you said so we can all hear what God has placed upon your heart from his word in this regard." And so that's what I want to do this morning. Some of this is in the little book that came out recently called, *Why one Way?*" which talks about an exclusive message in an inclusive time. So if you want further input that little book will provide it for you if you want something that you can pass along. Those are available to you in the bookstore.

Let me began by saying this, it seems to me that popular Evangelicalism today, and by that I simply mean most churches seem to be in this trend. The popular Evangelical fear today, the biggest fear that I see is the fear that somehow Evangelical Christianity will be out of synch with the culture. There seems to be an almost panic mode to figure out all the nuances of the world around us, all the nuances of society and culture, in order that we can somehow adapt the gospel, adapt the church to their thinking. There is underlying this one very important reality, however, that has to be stated and I will state it and then we'll go on to talk about it. And it is this, antipathy; hostility toward God's word resides in the heart of all natural human beings - that is unconverted people. They have a built in, ingrained, innate, antipathy toward biblical truth and the gospel. So if you're going to try to figure out a way to get in synch with the culture you must downplay the message of God, to which they naturally

rebel. Courting the favor of the world is a very serious thing to attempt and I say that, not in the sense that it's a serious human endeavor, but that it brings you into serious conflict with God Himself.

In James 4:4 we read, "You adulteresses," pretty strong language, "you harlots, you prostitutes. Do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." Now last Sunday morning you know that I gave a rather strong message. You of you were shocked when I told all the people who were here, including yourselves, that your worst enemy is God. That's true. God is the enemy of the world of the unconverted. Their thinking and their system, their attitudes, their dispositions, their conduct, their ideologies, are all in hostility toward God. They are the enemies of God and he is their enemy. To then become a friend of the world purposely is to choose to be an enemy of God. I am astounded, frankly, to think that the church in so many places would desire to be a friend of the world, and, therefore, put themselves in a position of being an enemy of God. Courting the world's favor, courting and catering to the unchurched and the church unconverted, aping every worldly fad in music and every worldly fad in lifestyle, terrified to offend somebody who's not a believer.

Evangelicalism has, because of those motivations, been hijacked by legions of carnal spin-doctors trying their best to convince the world that Christians can be just as worldly as non-Christians. That we can be just as inclusive, just as pluralistic, just as open minded as any post-modern politically correct world ling. Somehow the illusion is that if we can get into to buy that we think just the way they think they're more likely to embrace the gospel. This is a horrible error. The reason they resist the gospel is because they hate it. They're living in antipathy toward the truth of God. And wherever that antipathy lies they have a wall of rebellion erected. And in order for them ever to have a relationship with God that wall of rejection has to come down. That wall of rebellion has to come down.

And, so, as I pointed out a couple of weeks ago the goal of any preacher or any person giving a witness is to find exactly what it is in the gospel and in the Word of God that offends the unbeliever and talk directly to that. Because wherever it is that the rebellion exists is where the rebellion has to end. There has always been and always will be a fundamental, irreconcilable, incompatibility between the truth of God and the world. That's the way it is. And true gospel faith involves a denial of every worldly value. Biblical truth is an open contradiction to human philosophy and religion. And this is very basically what Jesus taught his apostles at the very outset.

In John 15, 18, and 19 he said, "The world hates you. That's the way it is, they hate you because you're not of the world." It is that distinction; it is that difference that makes clear their hatred. Jesus went on to say, "I chose you out of the world, you're not of the world, therefore, the world hates you. That's how it is." He didn't go on to say, "Now here's a plan to eliminate that hate." There is no plan.

In fact, in Luke 6:26 Jesus said, "Woe to you when all men speak well of you." The word woe means to curse, judgment, judgment on you. "Cursed be you when all men speak well of you for so did

they're fathers to the false prophets." False prophets can alter their message any way they want to get popular. And false prophets always want to be popular because they want to be rich. And the more people they can seduce the better. So the more people they offend the worse. So you got to eliminate as much offense as you can, woo the people in; seduce the people in so that you can get their money. "They do it for filthy lucre," the bible says. "But, woe to you who are the people of the truth when everybody speaks well of you because that's an indication that you have somehow prostituted yourself, you have become an adulteress in endeavoring to be a friend of the world."

In fact, Jesus said in John 7 and verse 7, "The world hates me and here's why, because I testify of it that it's works are evil." Jesus said, the reason they hate me is because I confront their evil; evil thinking, Ungodly thinking, blasphemous thinking, wrong religious thinking, as well as evil conduct. "The world hates me," Jesus said. And there never was a more winsome, a more wonderful perfect human being as he was, sinless Son of God, perfect holiness, perfect love, perfect beauty, perfect compassion. All the virtues that anybody could ever desire in a human being were in Jesus in absolute perfection. There never was a person who, from a human viewpoint, would be more winsome, more attractive than Jesus, at yet, they hated him and it had nothing to do with his personality. It had nothing to do with those characteristics that set him apart from all other human beings. It had to do with his confrontation of how they thought and how they acted, which he said was wrong. They were sinful. Their contempt for the gospel isn't directed at the messenger, it's directed at the message. That's how it has to be. Men love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil.

The simple statement of John 3, 19 and 20 is that evil people come to grips with their evil. They come to terms with their evil; they are in love with their evil. They do what they want to do, they do what feels good, they do sin as a way of life and because they love their sin, they, therefore, create systems that justify their sin. They're not going to live in guilt and remorse and anxiety if they don't have to. So to accommodate their love of sin they develop justification for that sin, systems of thinking and conduct that allow for their sin. They even make it into virtue. They love darkness because they love evil. And so when we come and confront their thinking as evil and their behavior as evil they are hostile toward that. That's how it is. That is fix, unchangeable. "The world hates you," Jesus said, "because it hates me. It hates me because I tell them that their works are evil."

So what are we as Christians doing in the world and what is our responsibility? What is the commission? To go into all the world and preach the gospel and to tell people everything that Jesus commanded them. In other words, we carry on the confrontational ministry of Jesus that confronts people who love their sin and have developed systems of self-justification for that sin. We tell them that their thinking is evil and that their conduct is evil and that there is a horrible horrible destiny in eternal hell awaiting them. That is the truth that we are called to tell them. And yet, through all of church history there've always been people who somehow want to mitigate the message, soften the message, downplay the message, make it less offensive. But through all church history there has

never been a time when the church had spiritual impact that it didn't confront the culture with the truth. The only times, and I say that advisedly, the only time the church has made any spiritual impact on the world is when the people of God have stood firmly and uncompromisingly and boldly for the truth. And proclaimed that truth right into the face of the world's hostility.

Whether you're an Evangelist, whether you're a pastor, whether you're a teacher, whether you're just a Christian giving a witness, it's the same thing. If we're gonna have any conquest in the spiritual sense, we're gonna have any impact in the effect in the world, we have to speak the truth into the situation. And wherever the rebellion is we have to speak it to that very point of contact. Find out what people don't like about the bible and where they have set up the walls of rebellion and that is the very point at which you must attack, because before they're gonna submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ as their adonai, they're gonna have to have that wall crushed. There's gonna have to be a broken and a contrite heart at the very point of their most rigid rebellion. And the church comes along with this kind of ministry, which is designed to kind of accommodate the culture and to figure out how to be a friend of the world. This faddish kind of ministry is not only a compromise but it is guaranteed to be obsolete because yesterday's fad is not tomorrow's lifestyle. Tomorrow's generation will renounce all of today's fads. Tomorrow's generation will renounce all of today's philosophies. Biblical Christianity and only biblical Christianity adheres to the Word of God, regardless of what the fads and philosophies are, regardless of what the society wants, what the culture says. Biblical Christianity holds its ground in the shifting sands of cultural evolution.

Here we are living in a time when the church is jettisoning its theology for the sake of becoming a friend to the world and ending up, I'm fearing, the enemy of the Lord of the church Himself, Jesus Christ. The characteristic of our modern philosophy today in this postmodern world is tolerance. That's the dominating dogma of our society, is tolerance for everything and everybody. That's the idea. And that has seeped into the church and the church now is wanting to be tolerant of everything and everyone. And so it more eagerly jettisons its message to accommodate a tolerant environment.

Now I want to give you what I would call a biblical paradigm in which to counter this today. This is one of those kinds of things where I'm just gonna talk to you from my heart a little bit. It was some months ago before the book came out, obviously, when I was sitting at my desk and I was thinking, "How can I give the people. . . how can I create something that will frame up a paradigm; a framework for thought that'll help people understand what's going on around them in the Christian world in Evangelicalism and how can I shape that?" And it's one of those kind of things that happens rarely where all of a sudden it hits you and within about 30 seconds I had the whole thing in my head and I wrote down 6 words on a piece of paper. Bing . . . bing . . . bing . . . bing . . . bing . . . bing, sequence of words. They stood the test of further scrutiny and here they come. Word number 1, here is a biblical paradigm for you the midst of an age of tolerance, an inclusive paradigm.

The first word is objectivity. Don't worry I'm not gonna get too philosophical on you. The first word is objectivity. If you're going to understand the way things really are with God, if you're going to understand what Christianity must be, what you must do and be in this society then you have to start here with objectivity, objectivity. When we say something is considered objectively or we talk about objectivity we're talking about something that is outside of us. If you say something is subjective it means that it is given to your own private assessment or private, personal, internal, intuitive understanding. If you say something is objective it is outside of you. You might say to somebody, "look, I don't want your subjective feelings about the issue just give me the objective facts. Objectivity is that which is outside of us. Subjectivity is that which is inside of us. In dealing with divine truth we're dealing with objectivity, with objectivity. That is to say, we start with the reality that the source of truth is completely outside of us. I can't tell you how important that is. The source of truth is completely outside of us. Luther called the bible the external word, the external word. It is fixed and it is outside of us. You can believe it or you cannot believe it. But it is not subject to your interpretation. You must understand this is outside of you.

That was what was so compelling to me when I was on the Larry King program and Deepak Chopra was saying, "Well I believe this and I believe this and this and that." He was talking about all this double talk that seduces people and on and on. And the Rabbi Krischner came on and said, "Well I believe and I believe this and I believe that." And I said, "Well with all due respect Mr. Chopra, Rabbi Krischner are not the authority." And Larry King knew, because we had talked about it, and he said to me, "And you don't believe you are either, do you John?" And I said, "No, I'm not. The bible is the authority." See that is revolutionary stuff. I don't care what Deepak Chopra thinks. I don't care what Krischner thinks. I don't care what I think. I don't care what any human being concocts as his philosophy of life. That doesn't make it true. That has no bearing of what is true. It has no relationship to what is true. What is true, if you never existed, interests me. I don't care what your opinion is. You bring to the table in terms of being a source of truth. No human being is a source of truth. That's true in the material world. There is no scientist who invented and inaugurated the law of gravity or centripetal force or any other law. Man can observe that, he can look at the material world and observe what someone else created, material truth.

The same is true in the spiritual realm. No human can lay claim to what is true spiritually, what is true eternally, what is true about God, what is true about man or angels. No man can invent that. That is the idiocy of our time. When you have all of these self-styled philosophers and all of these self-styled theologians saying, "Well I believe . . . well this is my . . ." Who cares? You have no bearing on what is true, none whatsoever. That is profoundly essential. To understand that simple idea is to literally knock the props out from under post modernism, because post modernism says everybody has his own truth. The fact is nobody does. This idea that you got your truth and I have my truth and his truth is good for him and my truth is good for me, nobody has truth because no man is the source of that truth. Truth doesn't come from men. You can read it, you can learn it, you can discern it, but you can't make it. You aren't the source of it. Authentic Christianity understands that. Authentic

Christianity understands that Scripture is the objective absolute divine truth, period, paragraph.

It is the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. And no person ever has had in himself any idea or any intuition or any experience that determined the truth. The truth comes from God. It comes down and it is in a book. And Paul says, "If somebody else comes, an apostle even, and preaches another gospel that is contrary to the revealed truth or even an angel comes and gives you another gospel let him be . . . what?" destroyed, cursed. You cannot determine truth. You have nothing to contribute to it. You hear these people today who would be extreme like philosophers and gurus that we referred to earlier, but you also hear Christian people who will say, "Well, you know, my experience indicates to me that this is what the bible means." Don't tell me that your experience makes no contribution to the bible. Has nothing to do with it.

I remember when I was up in a retreat center with one of the leading, well-known Evangelical teachers in America and we were walking along the road in a wooden area - very lovely area, and he said to me, "John, what do you think of the exception clause in Matthew 5?" Well in Matthew 5 there's an exception clause in the statement Jesus made about divorce. "If you divorce your wife except for the cause of fornication you cause her to commit adultery." In other words, there was only one exception. God says, "I want you to stay married. You're married for life except for divorce. And if you divorce for any other reason you cause your wife when she remarries to commit adultery because God doesn't recognize the divorce." He said, "What do you think of the exception clause?" I said, "Well what do I think of it isn't important. It's there and it's there. It says that the only exception of divorce is fornication." He said, "Well I don't believe in the exception clause." I said, "What do you mean you don't believe? You believe the bible don't you?" "Yes, of course, I believe the bible but I don't believe you can allow for the exception." I said, "Well show me." He said, "Okay, see those Canadian geese?" This is true. There was a pen with Canadian geese. And he said, "See those Canadian geese?" And I said, "Of course." He said, "We cut their wings so they don't fly and we feed them, we take care of them, and just keep em around here for the people to enjoy." And he said, "One day there was a hole in the fence and they all tried to get out and that's why you can't have an exception clause." Now to him this was profound insight. I said, "Look, just answer me one question. What does Matthew 5 mean if there are no geese? Those geese are not a part of the interpretive process of Matthew 5. How can you think like that?"

They've built a whole ministry on that kind of thinking. Your analogies and your illustrations and your experiences have nothing to do with how you interpret the Word of God. You bring nothing to the truth, nothing, except a submissive mind. No experience, no insight of yours has any bearing on the truth. This is an objective document. And God did us a great favor he put all the truth in one book. Sixty-six books make up the one book written by God but this is the one book that contains all the truth God wanted us to have and it's outside of us. I'm not necessary to an understanding of this truth. What would that say to everybody who lived before me and after me and who doesn't know me? What kind of idiocy is it to assume that somehow I have some spiritual contribution to make to

what the bible means? It is outside of me. Somebody says, "You know I think this verse means . . . no one cares what you think. No one care what you think this verse means. I want to know what does it mean, not to you, but to God. He wrote it. But see this goes against the grain of this postmodern world where there's no such thing as absolute truth. But the bible is absolute truth, fixed truth, outside of us. It is God's revealed truth and it is . . . I gave you that word a few weeks ago, perspicuous; it has perspicuity. That's an old word theologians used to use. It means clarity. It's not a bunch of puzzles, it's not a bunch of hidden things, it's clear. It's clear.

"There are some things," Peter said, "hard to understand." That's true. But for the most part it is clear. Those secondary matters are tough to understand. You can work hard at them and usually come to an understanding of them but the great bulk of Scripture, the main message of Scripture, is clear and unambiguous. And Peters writes in 2 Peter chapter 1 verses 20 and 21, that, "Scripture came, not by the will of man. Not by the will of men but holy men were moved by the Spirit of God." "And all Scripture then is given," as Paul writes to Timothy, "by inspiration. It is God breath." It is true whether you lived or didn't live. It is true whether you had an experience or didn't, whether your intuition was applied to it or not. It is true in and of itself. It isn't dependent on you or me or anybody else to bring truth to it. And by the way, Scripture only has one true meaning, just one. And I said this in the past and I say it again, if you don't get anything else, get this, the meaning of the Scripture is the Scripture. If you don't get the meaning you don't have the Scripture. Now some people say, "Oh, yeah, you know, I believe the bible and this is God's word." It's only God's word if you understood what he meant by what he said. It's the meaning that is the message. It is God's Word and its true meaning . . . listen . . . is contained in it. God put it there. You don't bring the true meaning to the Scripture.

I contest that one of the hardest things for me to cope with is this Christian TV thing, where you have people standing up saying, "God told me this and Jesus told me that and God showed me this and the Lord spoke to me about that." This is just horrific cause they're saying God said what he didn't say. They're saying Jesus said what he didn't say because this is the faith once for all delivered to the saints. And when God closed the book he said, "Don't add anything to this book or it'll be added to you the plagues that are written in it." God spoke here and then he stopped speaking. This is the Word of God.

But the second thing that drives me crazy about these people is, not only that they say God said what he didn't say, but they go to the bible and they say, "The Lord showed me this means this and this means that and this thing means this and here's how I interpret this verse." And somehow every verse, no matter where it is, is designed for God to tell you how rich you can be if you just believe. And they pervert the meaning of Scripture as if they were somehow given some special insight and without them we would never know the truth. This is such a serious thing. Because I said a couple of weeks ago to you, I don't wanna put words in anybody's mouth, but last of all God's.

Now this deals a tremendously heavy blow to a large segment of professing Christianity. We have people in good churches who are trying to learn how to listen for the voice of God. Somehow to turn on some spiritual antenna to hear God's voice, this is so dangerous, so dangerous. God has given us this truth in a book. The book of truth is objective; it is true, in and of itself. It is true whether you know it exists or not. It is true whether you understand it or not. It is true whether you feel it's true or not. It's true whether or not its ever been validated by anybody's experience. Psalm 1:19 1:6 he simply says, "The entirety of your word is true." Now that is the starting point of any kind of Christian worldview. And the reason the church today is in so much trouble is because it doesn't understand that starting point. We are bound to this truth. Bound to it.

They call themselves Christians. They talk about the bible. They say they believe it. They use the language of symbolic Christianity, but the real source of authority is themselves. They're getting messages from God and the Lord is showing this verse means that and this verse means this. True Christianity begins with objectivity. That's where we want to start. You have to begin . . . if you're gonna ever be confined to where God wants you in your thinking and your understanding of a true Christian world view, you have to be confined to this. God has revealed his truth in one book. This is it, the bible. And that truth is in the book and it is there in its fullness and you bring nothing to contribute to its truthfulness. You can explain what it means, you can proclaim the truth, you are not the source of that truth, God is.

Second word, rationality, rationality. The objective revelation of God in Scripture is to be understood rationally. There are some people who think you have to understand it mystically. Mysticism is such a disaster. Mysticism is the idea somehow that there are secret meanings hidden in the Scripture. That's a lie. The bible is to be understood rationally. You have an objective revelation. The meaning of the Scripture is the Scripture so how do we get to the meaning? The answer, we get to the meaning by using our minds. Not standing in a corner listening for the supposed voice of God. When it would come we wouldn't know if it was the voice of God or not. There are no promises that we would ever hear the voice of God, in fact, plenty of indication that we would not. But whatever feelings and impulses and intuitive senses we have could never be proven to be anything other than just our own wild musings. If we're going to understand the Scripture, which is objective truth, we have to understand it with our minds rationally. Let me put it as simple as I can: the bible is logical, non-contradictory, clear, and subject to human reason, sanctified human reason, those who are believers.

There are no errors in the bible. There are no inconsistencies in the bible. There are no lies in the bible perpetrated on us by God, although there are people who lied and their lying is recorded there. There are no unsound principles in the bible. There are no fantasies in the bible. There are no absurdities in the bible. There are no inconsistencies in the bible. There are no myths in the bible, no legends and no allegories. It is a book to be understood like any book. If you read a book on the

history of western civilization you would know you were reading actual history, real people, true events. And you would interpret it and process it mentally like that. If you're reading a book about American history you'd do the same thing. You study the bible; you interpret the bible with your rational mind the same way you do a math problem. The same way you do a calculus problem. The same way you design a schematic for some machine you're building. The same way you solve any kind of problem in the world - you use your mind. You have here an infallible and inerrant, true document given by God, real people, real events, actual history, normal language. It is to be understood rationally by the mind. It is not understood mystically. It is not a matter of saying, "You know the Lord came down and told me this meaning." That is absolutely wrong. It is to be understood by the process of reason in the same way that you understand any issue in life using your mind. And that's how you get at the meaning of Scripture, which is the Scripture.

Let me give you an illustration of this. Go back to Nehemiah chapter 8. In the 8th chapter of Nehemiah there's recorded a revival. You remember that Nehemiah was the leader of Israel after they came back from . . . actually of Judah. After they came back from captivity in Babylon they were rebuilding the nation. Well it had been a long time since they had the Word of God. They had been off in captivity and now they're back. The Word of God is found, it is dusted off, and the people in chapter 8 of Nehemiah verse 1 gather at the water gate. That's the gate, obviously, where they went to and fro to get the water into the rebuilt city of Jerusalem. "They asked Ezra, who was the preeminent scribe to," that would be a man who was the theologian who was the master of Scripture. "They asked him to bring the book of the Law of Moses, to bring their Pentateuch; the 5 first books of the Old Testament, which the Lord had given to Israel. Ezra, not only a scribe, but a priest," verse 2, "brought the law before the assembly of men, women, and all that could listen with understanding on the first day of the seventh month. And he read from it before the square in the middle of city, which was in front of the water gate from early morning until midday," which would be 6:00 in the morning until into the afternoon, long time of reading. "And he read in the presence of men and women." Remember they hadn't heard the Word of God in a long long time. "And they stood and listened throughout the day. He read to those who could understand and all the people were attentive to the book of the law." So he's reading and he's reading hour upon hour upon hour.

Drop down to verse 8 "He was assisted by other men who helped him read." You will notice at the end of verse 7 in the verse there're names of these others who explained the law to the people while the people remained in their place. So they would read it and they would explain it. Verse 8, "They read from the book, from the law of God," you see the word "translating" in the NAS but the marginal reading is better, "explaining." They're not translating it because the people knew the Hebrew language in which it was written. They didn't need a translator. What they needed was somebody to explain it. They needed an expositor. "And so they explain to give the sense so that they understood the reading." This is a mental process. Ezra and the other scribes read the Scripture and they explain the meaning of it because, as I said, meaning of the Scripture is the Scripture. If you don't have the meaning you don't have the Scripture.

Now Ezra was prepared to do this back in chapter 7 of the Book of Ezra, the prior book to Nehemiah. I'll just read you verse 10. "Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord and to practice it, to live it, and to teach his statutes and his ordinances in Israel." Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord. Tradition says that Ezra had, if any man had, mastered the law of God. It was said that Ezra could literally write from memory all the book of the Old Testament canon, of course, in Hebrew, as a scribe. He had so diligently studied the law of God. The reason he could stand up with the other scribes who were a part of his association and explain it was because they had studied it. It escapes some people that you can't explain the meaning of the Scripture if you don't study the Scripture.

That's why in Paul's letter to Timothy he said in 2 Timothy 2, "Study to show yourself approved under God, a workman that need not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." If you don't study and divide it right you ought to be ashamed. Approaching the bible is not some mystical kind of event. It is just plain hard work. I've had young men say to me through the years, you know, "What's the secret to your bible teaching? Tell us what's the secret to your bible teaching." And I will tell them this invariably; "The secret to really good bible teaching is the ability to keep your rear end in a chair until you understand what it means." "Oh, that's not very mystical. It's not very spiritual." "No, it's hard work." It's like Proverbs says, it's like mining, digging and digging and digging and digging, because you have to use your mind. The mind has to be purified at salvation. And then the mind has to be trained and then applied to the Scripture. The Scripture's power is only released when its truth is released. And its truth is only released when it is rightly interpreted. Give me great minds. Give me gifted disciplined men who will do the hard work of study.

You know we have such a truly shallow, trivial, willy-nilly handling of Scripture today. You know, we live in a society where intellectualism is just disappearing so so rapidly. This is a, I guess you could say, it's an anti-intellectual culture. If you want to know how anti-intellectual our culture is just look at the public discourse. Look at the public discourse. Look at the music, it's idiotic, it's stupid. It has no complexity. Great music . . . the reason classical music stands apart and lasts and it's called classical is because of its intelligent complexity. It manifests amazing mental capability. The music you hear today is stupid, dumbed-down music sung by people who have only stupid dumbed-down thoughts. That's true. There's a reason why something is classical and something passes with the wind. There's a certain level of genius. Our whole society has lost refinement. We've lost the ability to think precisely about anything. And it shows up in the way we dress, and it shows up in the way we act, and it shows up in our music, and it shows up in our literature, and it shows up in the public discourse. The English language is suffering because of it, into kind of a sloppy kind of declining precision where the exalted heroes of our culture speak a kind of crass and bass garbled language, which they've invented, as if there's some virtue in that. So we live in a time of anti-intellectualism and it's seeped into the church.

There are people who are supposed to be teaching and preaching the Word of God who make no effort what so ever to grapple with the profound realities of its truth and make sure that its interpretation is right. You know, we don't send people to seminaries so they can boost their ego; we send them there because the work they do to preach the Word of God is dead serious stuff. And if you're gonna teach the truth of God you have to be able to interpret the bible because the truth has to be understood by a careful analysis of every Scripture. This whole society we live in has been reduced to slogans and 30-second sound bites and TV talk show tripe, digested by millions of bored, lonely Americans who are hungry for that sort of stuff. It's very unsatisfying and fulfilling.

You know the literacy rate in America today is lower than it was in puritan New England in the 17th century, the 18th century. Ninety-five percent of the New England puritans were illiterate. Cotton Mather, the American puritan said, "Ignorance is the mother, not of devotion, but of heresy." Dumb-down a society, make it ignorant of doctrine and heresy will have a field day. And it is. You need to be precise in your life. You need to be defined and confined to careful, direct, disciplines of interpretation to get to the truth of Scripture and to rightly represent it. And then when you do all that work and you do that people get mad at you and think you're unloving. Fine. I can't deal with that but I will deal with God having given me a responsibility to handle his word accurately.

Now just about everything in the Evangelical world has been dumbed-down to a cultural-king of slang instead of lofty, deep and precise thinking about lofty, deep and precise divine truth. Careful cultivation of the mind is missing and it's not on a high priority list, believe me, in our society. It's not even on a list of priorities for Christians anymore. What we need is sound minds to be able to rationally interpret Scripture. You understand what I mean? I'm not talking about rationalism. I'm talking about using your mind to interpret the Scripture accurately. No secret meanings, no allegories, no transcendental insights, no divine voices, no mystical interpretations. That idea that mysticism holds is the truth comes from within you that is a lie, it does not. It rejects the rational. Mysticism of any kind absolutely nullifies the truth. Somebody said to me after hearing Rabbi Kushner, "He says he's a rabbi. He says he's a Jewish rabbi. All he did was give his opinion. Is that consistent with being a Jewish rabbi?" Of course not, even a Jewish rabbi has an authority, the bible. And if he doesn't accept the Old Testament as the authority then he's not a rabbi, he's a philosopher. And you know what a philosopher is, somebody who gives you his opinion? And the only difference between a philosopher and the guy at the gas station is that the philosopher has a PhD. But his opinion is no more meaningful than the next guy.

Third word. You can tell I can go on with this one. Third word . . . but I gotta finish . . . veracity, veracity. If we understand the bible as objectivity, truth objective outside of us, we understand that in order to comprehend the bible, to interpret it correctly, we have to approach it rationally with our minds. Then we can understand that having done that it will yield veracity. That's the word for truth. We'll get the truth. Here the truth lies, rationally understood it yields itself to us. Objective revelation of Scripture interpreted rationally yields divine truth in perfectly sufficient measure to accomplish

God's intention for that revelation. Another way to say that when you have rightly divided the Word you have the truth. You have all the truth God wants you to have. He put it all in the bible. That's all the truth we need. Not one jot or tittle will ever be removed from this until it's all fulfilled. You don't take away from it; you don't add to it, this is it. All we're required to do is to understand it. The bible understood yields the truth. Yields the truth. Scripture is true and all that it affirms and all that it asserts. It is the truth by which all other truth claims must be measured.

One time the owner of the LA Times came here visiting on a number of Sundays and curious to see what was going on and what I was saying. And we had lunch after those visits and he said, "You know," he said, "you have a lot of influence, you have all these people and radio. Why don't you give your opinion?" he said, "Why don't you give your opinion? More often, why don't you take the public forum and give your opinion." And I said to him, I said, "You know, do you really want another opinion? You got a whole section in the LA Times of opinions. You've got all these _____ writers writing their opinions; you've got all these other opinions. You want another opinion?" "Well," he said, "come to think of it . . ." I said, "I would be willing to do something though if you'd like. I'd be willing to write a column that wouldn't be opinion but would be the truth about everything. I'd be happy to do that. I'll just tell you the truth about everything." Well, that was the last meeting. Well there's an antipathy toward the truth. Gracious time, good conversation. There's no interest in having the truth. The truth threatens everything that the culture's built on. That's why I said at the beginning, friendship with the world is an enemy with God. If you want to be a friend of the world you're gonna be the enemy of God. You're gonna adulterate or prostitute your purpose. But that's true.

I could write an article and tell the truth about everything. I could tell the truth about what's wrong with our society. I could go right down the list with every issue: abortion, euthanasia, homosexuality, I could tell them what's wrong with the Catholic Church. The reason priest's behave like that is because they're unregenerate. They may be religious but they're unconverted. And the power of God is an operative in their lives. Their particular sin may be different than somebody else's but it's the same old problem. It's how unregenerate people act. That would be true in Protestant churches as well. I could say some things about what is clearly indicated in the Scripture, that's the truth. It's not about opinion.

You know the bible is not a book about relationships. I hear somebody say, "It's a book about rela . . ." It's not a book about relationships. Somebody else said, "It's a book about success." It's not a book about success; it's a book about truth, about divine truth. It's the truth of God and Christ and man and sin. It's the truth. And it doesn't need to be supplemented with psychology or visions or revelations. It doesn't need to be supplemented by cults and extra biblical insights. It is the truth. It's the truth.

Just an illustration of how contrary this is to today. Instead of saying the bible is the truth and confronting falsehood, this is what the Evangelical world is doing, "Well, you know, we need to

dialogue. We need to dialogue with those who hold different views. There're wonderful benefits from dialogue." With error. "Really"? I can't think of one. I can't think of one. You say, "What do you mean?" Error makes no contribution to the truth. It makes no contribution to the truth. The truth is the truth. If you want to know the truth read the bible. You don't have to study error to know the truth. The error makes no contribution. And, yet, today, we want to have Muslims come and stand in the pulpit, as some churches did right after 911, and they want to sit down and dialogue, and dialogue, and then the people in the church come out and say, "You know, we didn't realize we had so much in common," is what it does. Let me say it again, error makes no contribution to the truth.

I suppose I could go off to some school . . . I was gonna get a doctorate at one time and went to Claremont School of Theology. It was just totally liberal, totally denying everything that I believed. But somebody thought I ought to get a doctorate so I went over there and I went through these hoops and they made me learn German so I went off to junior college and learned German so I could read these books in German and all that. And then I was gonna learn French to read French books. I looked at the list of books and they were all error. And then they said, "We're gonna have you take two summer courses." One had to do with Jesus in the cinema, in which, somehow the ethics of the human Jesus was applied to some avant-garde films. And the other course was a course on the search for the real Jesus, which, of course, you wouldn't find the biblical one at all. So I went to the guy who was putting the program together and I said, "I'm done. I'm out. I'm not doing this course." I was just a young guy at the time, it was before I came here to the church, and I said, "You know, I already know the truth. What contribution is all this going to make to my knowledge of the truth? Two things could happen, one, I'll survive and waste my money and my time. Two, I won't survive and this'll steal some of my convictions. But I can't find anything positive that could possibly come out of this because error makes no contribution to the truth. I don't need that kind of dialogue."

Anytime you hear Evangelicals talking about dialogue they're talking about compromise. They prefer dialogue because it minimizes the differences, downplays the differences between the truth and a lie. I've never found that any of these dialogues are supposed to make the distinctions more clear. That's what I tried to do. Did you watch that Larry King thing? That's what I was trying to do. I was in a kind of discussion but I just wanted to use that discussion to point out how different what Christianity says is from what these people are talking about. I wasn't looking for common ground. I was looking for distinction because dialogue, all that does is feed compromise. All we what to do is go to the Word of God, use our rational mind, come to the true meaning. Once we determine that true meaning we have the truth. Right? And the truth is distinct from all else.

That leads me to a fourth word. I'll hurry. The fourth word is authority, authority. Now if I've had you up to here I've got you now. The noose is tightening because, if, in fact, this is God's truth then it bears authority. True? This is the Word of God. It is, as Peter said, "The oracles of God." That's why the Apostle Paul writing to Titus and saying to him, "These things speak and exhort or approve with all authority. Let no one circumvent that authority." When you stand up and speak the Word of

God this is not a human opinion, this is not somebody's idea, this is not one among many, this is the last word on everything, authoritative. Scripture is the final word on everything on which it speaks.

Now that is not stylish today. That just drives people wild. I get criticized for this, not so much from the secular world, although that's true, but even from the Evangelical world. Who think that it's not even Christian to have such strong convictions about the Scriptures. That's an interesting twist, isn't it? It's more Christian not to have any strong convictions. Speak with authority.

And I said this to you in the past and I would say it again. The church today loves hard hearts. You say, "How do you know that?" Oh, they love hard hearts. "How do you know?" Because of soft preaching. Soft preaching produces hard hearts. It's just how it is. We would like to think that soft words produce soft hearts, they don't. Soft words produce hard hearts. And if you preach a soft, easy, popular, soothing message that trouble the mind or the heart or anything in-between, you preach that kind of stuff then you're content with a hard heart. Hard preaching makes soft hearts because preaching the authoritative truth of the Word of God breaks down the walls of rebellion. It's like Jeremiah said, "Your word is a hammer. It's a fire," Jeremiah 23:29. It's like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces. God wants a broken heart, doesn't he, and a contrite heart. How you gonna break that up? Not with soft, soothing words. You're gonna come in with the truth and it's gonna break up the hard heart. So you know that people today are content with hard hearts. Hard hearts mean disobedient hearts, sinful hearts. They're content with that because they preach soft messages. Hard preaching makes soft hearts. And I said this, you know, wherever a person is hard is where the Word of God has to be applied. So we don't make any equivocation. If this is true then we preach it as the truth, not in an unloving way or an ungracious way. Once we determine it's the truth then it's God's truth and God's truth is always binding, right? Always binding.

There's a fifth word. This is the word incompatibility. And now the noose is really tight. This revelation given to us objectively in a book rightly understood and interpreted yields absolute truth that is authoritative on every subject on which it speaks, and, fifthly, incompatible with anything that contradicts it. Truth is absolutely incompatible with error.

I'll give you a good little verse to keep in mind. 1 John 2:21, "No lie is of the truth." No lie is of the truth, that's the law of non-contradiction. No lie is of the truth. If something is a lie it's not true. If something is true it's not a lie. In other words, to say there's a distinction between what's true and what's not. People say, "Oh, you know, I believe in the doctrine of justification by grace alone through faith alone and Christ alone, and those people, they have another doctrine of justification but there's certainly room for that. And God certainly understands all of that." That's not true. This is the true doctrine as revealed in Scripture. That is a lie. God hates lies and liars and those who perpetrate lies. There's no way you can have truce between truth and a lie. People say, "Well, you know, yeah, the bible does teach that Jesus is God but there are lots of people in the world who don't know Jesus and they don't know that he's God. And, certainly, God's gonna except them." That's not what the

bible says. The bible says, "No man comes onto me except the Father draw him, and there's no name under heaven whereby they must be saved except the name of Jesus Christ, Acts 4:12. "I am the way of the truth and the light, no one comes to the Father but by me." God's gonna draw you but he's gonna draw you through me, through my name, through Christ. That's what the bible says. If that's true, and it is because the bible says it and it's authoritative, then anything other than that is not true. But here we are in this post modern world where everybody says, "Oh, sure that's true but, oh, this might be true too. We don't want to get too narrow." You see this is what really irks people, is the incompatibility of the truth with error. It will not make a truce with error.

Truth is intolerant of error and that sets off all the cultural alarms, doesn't it? They just go berserk. You say, "Well aren't you tolerate, aren't you tolerant?" Sure, tolerant of people, that's a biblical virtue. Tolerant of error, that's a biblical sin. Tolerance is fine when it's toward people, compassion, but not toward lies, error. We have to come to grips with the fact folks that the truth of God's word is incompatible with what people believe: false religions, philosophies, ideologies, whatever.

And so there is . . . back to where we started . . . a basic inherent built in antipathy toward the truth of God in the heart of sinners. And somehow, even in churches today, they have adopted the posture of the seekers they seek and feel that same need to accept what is contradictory to the Word of God as okay.

Isaiah 8:20 said, "To the law and testimony, go to the book, if they do not speak according to this word it's because there's no light in them." Anybody who's contrary to the Scripture is in darkness. It's no compatible, absolutely not compatible with the truth. And this is offensive to people because they love their sin and they love the systems that justify their sin.

The last word . . . then I'll stop . . . integrity. And I don't need to say a lot about it, the word integrity. This is where it ends if, in fact, as we have pointed out, it is true and it is, that you have a revelation from God to be understood rationally, which then gives us the truth of God, which is authoritative and incompatible. The final word is integrity. What that simply says is, if all of that is true, and I affirm all of that, then I must live and preach this word, right? I mean, look at it like this, if I preach all this to you, if I say I believe all this, and then I'm unfaithful to my wife and I scandalize the church and run off with some woman or steal money from the offering, what are you gonna conclude? That everything I ever told you was hypocritical. Right? Because the end of this kind of conviction is a life that matches the conviction.

That's one of the good things, you know, about being in a church over 30 years. It's a hard thing for people today to trust their pastors. They're not around long enough for them to get to know them. I think you understand that you can't say you believe this and then live contrary to it. You can't do that. Then people question that you ever believed it. If this, in fact, is God's Word rationally understood, yielding his truth, which has authority over my life and is incompatible with error, if I believe that is

true, and I do, then that demands that I would live and proclaim this truth. Don't say you believe it if you don't live it. And if you believe it you'll live it. I can tell what somebody believes about the Word of God. I can tell how deep and pure and true that belief is by how they live their life. "Don't profess to know God," as Titus 1 says, "profess to love his word and then in works deny him." Integrity is the capstone on the paradigm. Whatever Scripture says I wanna live, I wanna proclaim. Anything else is hypocrisy. Ezra prepared his heart to seek the law, to study the law of the Lord and to do it and to teach it. That's a man of integrity.

Let's pray. Father thank you for our time this morning to consider these critical, needful things. And may you confirm to our heart that which will make a difference in our lives to your eternal glory. In Christ name we pray. Amen.

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