

A Time to Weep

Part 2

In our last message, we identified what we believe to be one of the greatest hindrances to our corporately experiencing the Feast of Tabernacles. As we'd stated, this obstacle has to do with an evolving idea of tolerance.

Erwin Lutzer, in his book, "*Christ Among Other Gods: A Defense of Christ in an Age of Tolerance*", wrote, "Our highly specialized, consumer-oriented society has redefined God so that He no longer stands in judgment of our culture but rather endorses it. According to the book, 'The Day America Told the Truth', the word God to most Americans is 'a distant and pale reflection of the God of their forefathers...This is not the 'jealous God' of the Old Testament but...a general sense of good and happiness in the world'. And someone has said that heaven for modern man looks like the biggest shopping mall one can imagine. We have a god who desires our pleasure, a god (or goddess, if you prefer) who promotes feminism, sexual preferences, abortion, and radical individualism. We have a god who is wholly committed to our happiness and who believes in human potential. We have a god who lets us make up our own ten commandments.

"For such a kinder, gentler god to flourish, we have had to bow before another god who is undisturbed by the moral/spiritual/religious diversity in our culture. This god's name is tolerance. Officially, sin does not exist in our society, but if there were one sin left it would be a belief in objective truth, a belief that some things still are right or wrong; a belief that discrimination still has value if defined as being discriminating in what we believe, the way we behave, and what we defend.

"'To live and let live' has now been enshrined as the one non-negotiable absolute of society. Only what is often defined as intolerance is utterly intolerable. Our God is as tolerant as a talk show host, as loving as a doting grandparent, and, I might add, as relevant as last year's calendar.

"...The tolerance of which I speak—our national icon, if you will—is an uncritical tolerance that avoids vigorous debate in the quest for truth. This new tolerance insists that we have no right to disagree with a liberal social agenda; we should not defend our views of morality, religion, and respect for human life. This tolerance respects absurd ideas but will castigate anyone who believes in absolutes or who claims to have found some truth. This tolerance, someone has said, includes every point of view except those points of view that do not include every point of view. *This is tolerance only for those who march in step with the tolerant crowd*"—end quote.

Well, that pretty well sums up the present trend we're witnessing in the world. What's even more alarming is that it's also what we're witnessing in the church. Therefore, on

that last line of Bro. Lutzer's quote, we'll continue with our examination of Joel's prophecy.

"THE TOLERANCE BRIGADE"

As did the first, the second chapter of Joel opens on an ominous tone. According to the prophet, the Day of the Lord is at hand; but, from his description, it's anything but bright and cheerful. It's described as a day of darkness, of gloominess; a day of clouds and of thick darkness (in other words, it's a time of spiritual heaviness and limited visibility). Needless to say, this is *not* the kind of morning one likes to wake up to!

There have been a range of ideas expressed regarding the interpretation of this first part of Joel's prophecy. Some believe that it portrays a singular scene from two different angles. Others seem to think that it describes two different events. And others, still, have viewed it as the prediction of at least four different events spread out over a period of years.

It might be that chapter one and chapter two are different descriptions of the same scene; that what we see in chapter one is but the internal view of what is externally occurring in chapter two. But we would be more inclined to believe that chapter one *leads* into chapter two. In other words, what happens in chapter one makes it possible for that which happens in chapter two. Do you follow what we're saying here? Chapter one presents a view of the land (spiritually speaking), and the ravages of a plague which has taken place upon that soil; while chapter two gives us a picture of a people, who invade and thus make spoil of the inhabitants of the land. Either way they are viewed, the association between them cannot be denied. *The locusts of chapter one and the army of chapter two are allied together!* The invasion of the locusts sets the stage for the advancement of the army. They pave the way, by stripping the land, and weakening the inhabitants. The army then comes to lead the people of that land into captivity! You might say that while the locusts of chapter one typify certain ideas; chapter two describes the people who embody them!

We realize that the moment we mention this, some will immediately raise their objections. For years, now, we've heard it said that the army described in chapter two was a depiction of the manifestation of the sons of God. It's been taught from the perspective that they will march throughout the land, and invade the enemy's camp. We have no doubt that that will be the case concerning the sons of God at a given time; and in certain realms, it's even now occurring. But we have a problem interpreting *this* particular passage that way, simply for reasons which emerge from the text.

If we were to remove the chapter and verse breaks added by the translators, we would discover one consistent and uninterrupted vision given here. It is but one singular stream of revelation flowing from the mouth of the prophet. From the opening of chapter one, and throughout the first part of chapter two, there is nothing in the text which would indicate a shift in that which the reader should expect, i.e. from a dreadful revelation of divine chastisement, to one of hope for restoration (at least, not at this point). Without

controversy, the atmosphere is the same in both chapters. It's a day of darkness and gloominess, like the morning clouds spread upon the mountains (howbeit, these are clouds *without* rain). Furthermore, the land, the *same* land as described in chapter one, is further reduced and decimated in chapter two. The characters depicted in chapter two have the same effect on the land as do those in chapter one. And, we should also add, there is no indication whatsoever that the focus has shifted from the land of promise, to that of the enemy's.

We stand to be corrected if we're wrong, but any time we find any of God's people described in this fashion, and having this kind of oppressive effect upon their own land and people, it's because they had turned from the living God, and pursued their own heart's lusts. Whenever Israel broke covenant with Jehovah, it was typical for their leadership (not always, but often) to turn on them. The priests and prophets were said to have become the enemies of God, and were described as having eaten up His vineyard (Isa. 3:14). They were depicted as insensitive, self-serving adversaries, who beat down and preyed upon their own. Therefore, had Joel been describing the manifestation of the sons of God here, he would have been portraying them as oppressors, rather than restorers. Furthermore, he would have been totally inconsistent with the commonly shared phraseology of the prophets. Without exception, every one of them used these same expressions when describing those who would be instrumental in executing God's disciplinary judgment against His people (and against other nations which He saw fit to punish) , but who were not necessarily knowledgeable of the fact.

For instance, in Isaiah chapter 10, the Lord says that the Assyrians are "*the rod of My anger, and the staff in their hand is Mine indignation. I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of My wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets. Howbeit he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so...*" In Habakkuk chapter 1, the Word of the Lord is, "*Behold ye among the heathen, and regard, and wonder marvelously: for I will work a work in your days, which ye will not believe, though it be told you. For, lo, I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, which shall march through the breadth of the land, to possess the dwellingplaces that are not theirs...their horsemen shall spread themselves, and their horsemen shall come from far; they shall fly as the eagle that hasteth to eat...then shall his mind change, and he shall pass over, and offend, imputing this his power unto his god*". Concerning the judgment of Babylon in Isaiah chapter 13, the Lord prophetically refers to the Medes as His "sanctified ones", even His "mighty ones for [His] anger". "*They come from a far country, from the end of heaven, even the Lord, and the weapons of His indignation, to destroy the whole land...*" Then, notice particularly the effects their presence brings: "*Therefore shall all hands be faint, and every man's heart shall melt: and they shall be afraid: pangs and sorrows shall take hold of them; they shall be in pain as a woman that travaileth: they shall be amazed one at another; their faces shall be as flames...Behold, I will stir up the Medes against them...*" And in Nahum chapter 3, it is said of Nineveh, "*Make thyself many as the cankerworm, make thyself many as the locusts...Thy crowned are as the locusts, and thy captains are as the great grasshoppers...*".

We read in Romans 8:19-21 that when God's sons are fully manifested, they'll bring about deliverance to a groaning creation; but not once is this army described in Joel chapter 2 said to bring anything which even vaguely resembles liberation. In fact, the creation is still in a groaning travail, perplexed by the conditions which exist throughout the land (Joel 1:18-20).

The fact that this "army" climbs over the wall, rather than coming through the Door; that before them, the faces of the people gather "blackness" (NKJV says, "*Before them the people writhe in pain; all faces are drained of color*"); that before them the land is as the garden of Eden, but in their wake, it is as a desolate wilderness (contrast this with God, Who, in verse 14 of chapter two, is expected to leave *a blessing* behind Him, even a grain and drink offering); are all evidences that lead us to believe that this is *not* a "peace-keeping mission", this is *not* an army of fun-loving boy-scouts (no offense intended to the BSA), and their ill-effects upon both the land and the people are *not* among those to be desired! These are "mental mercenaries", you might say, who are skilled in the art of ideological warfare.

So, you may ask...if these are not the sons of God, then who, pray tell, are they? It's our conviction that they primarily represent the vast network of secular and religious thinkers scattered throughout the world, who are collectively pushing for universal inclusivity. They represent a wide range of individuals in a variety of professions...from news anchors and talk show hosts, to college professors and educators on every level; from Hollywood celebrities and activists of "alternative lifestyles", to fashion designers and trend setters in the market place; from script writers, magazine editors, and political spokespersons for those in positions of power, to even cartoonists and story writers of supposedly "innocent" children's movies. And last, but certainly not least, they represent the outspoken leaders of various religions, who are striving to bring about a postmodern utopia of peace and unity for the planet...but who don't mind following a "scorched earth" policy to make it happen. This "army" of moral relativists has employed every communication tool available today, sneaking over the walls, and creeping in through the windows, in order to convert the masses to it's worldview; and it has absolutely no hesitation in destroying anything that gets in it's way, either! Which of us has not witnessed the driving force and power of this army? Everywhere you look, the propagandizers are right there, in your face...deliberately attempting to engineer society in a way that conforms to their point of view. Whether it's done openly or subtly, the message of multi-cultural inclusivism (which, incidentally, is the Adamic man's version of the Feast of Tabernacles) is being proclaimed from every vantage point possible. And, judging from the results, their recruiting strategy has done very well. They've successfully sold their ideas to the public, without the public ever suspecting what was happening. Sad to say, many within Christendom have unwittingly and unintentionally "enlisted" among their ranks, simply because they have not understood the objective. They have allowed the world to redefine such things for them as tolerance, love, justice, etc., and have been all too willing to promote these twists of meaning as "new" revelations for "a new millennium".

One of the things which has obviously confused a lot of folks is the fact that Joel said this army would not break their ranks, and that if they should fall upon the sword, they would not be wounded. For certain, this would be a desirable thing any kingdom would want for its soldiers. And for years, we, too, failed to understand how this would apply to an adversarial army. But, having witnessed the solidarity shared by those who promote this "new" liberal tolerance, it all makes perfect sense to us now. They march in their own ways, and each one continues along his own path. And yet, they will not speak out against anyone else's belief, even if it is diametrically opposed to the absolutes found in God's Word. You see, while they may differ somewhat in the path that they take, they still basically hold the same epistemological perspective. They all march to the cadent call, "Let's just agree not to disagree!"

AN INVASION OF INCLUSIVIST THEOLOGY

We've heard several teachings recently, which let us know that some of our brethren have not been as discerning as they ought. Also, it shows that some have very shrewdly used the new tolerance to their own advantage, in order to promote certain things which, under normal circumstances, would never fly with God's people. Teachings, such as, "God is in every man", "Every man has a divine spark in him", "all people are innately good at heart", "God is the Father of all men", "all men are already saved, whether they know it or not", and "there is no such thing as a sinner outside of the Body of Christ", are not only being taught by popular New Age advocates, such as Bishop Shelby Spong, Marianne Williamson, Elaine Pagels, Wayne Dyer and Deepak Chopra; and in New Age textbooks, such as *"A Course in Miracles"*, but have found their way among a number of Kingdom and sonship ministries, as well. These teachings march in lock-step with the spirit of the age, and are designed to bring everyone under the same banner. But the problem with them is that they circumvent key Christian concepts, which are absolutely necessary for spiritual transformation.

We don't intend to deal with these things at length, but let's look for a moment at this teaching that God is in all men, or that all men have what has been described as a "divine spark" in them. This idea is primarily based on John 1:9, "*He is the true Light, which lighteth every man which cometh into the world*". Those who promote this teaching assume that the "lighting" spoken of here speaks of God's indwelling presence, or of the presence of His divine "Seed". But is this the impression John wanted to convey to his readers when he wrote this? Let's see...

To begin with, we should point out that there are two words interpreted as "life" in John's gospel (and, for that matter, basically only three throughout the entire New Testament). The first is *bios*, and is defined as life, generally speaking. It is from thence that we get such English words as "biology" and "biophysics" (that which has to do with living organisms). The second word is *psuche*, which is associated with breath, or respiration. The third word, *zoe*, is the most common of the three, and is simply defined as "vitality, mutually shared by all living things, i.e. plants, animals, and human beings". We get the terms "zoo" and "zoology" from it. And it is this word that is found in John 1:4, "*In Him was life (zoe); and the life was the light of men*".

The idea has been popularized in certain Pentecostal circles that the word *zoe* refers to the life of the Spirit, or, as one Charismatic teacher put it, "the God kind of life". But, as we've just stated, this conclusion is not entirely accurate. *Zoe* speaks of natural life, in a strictly general sense. It is only when the Greek adjective *aionian* is connected with it, or when it is clearly defined by its text, that it is meant to describe the life of the ages, divine life, or the life of the Spirit. (For example, see Jn. 3:16; 6:47; 17:3; Rom. 6:22; Gal. 6:8; I Jn. 2:25).

When John begins his gospel, he does so by first establishing the deity of Christ, and the fact that He alone is the Author of life. "*All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made.*" Next, he says, "*In Him was life (zoe); and the life was the light of men*"(verse 4). Notice that he equates the term *life* with *light*, and thereafter uses the two terms synonymously. This leads directly into the statement under consideration, "*that (Jesus Christ) was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world*"(verse 9). By following this contextual train, it's easy to see that what John was saying was that no man comes into the world without first receiving his natural *zoe* (life or vitality) from Jesus. However, the same could be said of plants and animals, as well. This was exactly the point Paul was making, when he told the men of Mars Hill that God "*giveth to all life (zoe) and breath (pnoe, respiration), and all things*" (Acts 17:25). Both apostles were establishing the fact that life can only be derived from the Creator, the Lord Jesus Christ. And while we know that He is the giver of both natural and spiritual life, it must be understood that the subject under consideration here is natural life in particular; the life of the flesh. (Failing to recognize a distinction between the two kinds of life has led some to conclude that even dogs and trees have a "divine spark"! As John Stossell would say, "Give me a break!")

That this "lighting" of every man which comes into the world is not referring to some mutually shared "divine spark", or that all men are automatically members of the family of God by virtue of their natural birth, is clearly seen by the verses immediately following (note particularly the distinction John makes among men): "*He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. But as many as received Him, to them gave He power (the ability) to become the sons (children, offspring) of God, even to them that believe on His name, which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*" (Verses 10-13). Could he have possibly made his thoughts any clearer on this? We don't think so! Therefore, to assume that all men already have God (or a "divine" spark of Him) in them, or that all men are already in the family of God, based upon this passage of scripture, would be a gross misrepresentation of John's words. According to him, receiving Christ, and believing on His name, are both necessary requirements for this dubious honor.

In connection with this, we might mention that Paul's words to the men of Mars Hill have also been mishandled (when he quoted one of their poets in Acts 17:28 as saying, "*we are also His [God's] offspring*"). These words have been used as proof that Paul considered the heathen to be a natural born part of the family of God. But the truth of the matter is, he was merely taking poetic license with them, in order to make his point. In

the sense of having emerged from the Creator, all material creation could be thought of as being the "fruit" of His doing; that is, as being an extension of Himself (the result of His creative genius; His "brainchild", if you will). And in the sense that man was originally created in God's image (spirit, soul, and body), God is better understood by relating Him to man, rather than to images of wood or of stone (if you'll go back and read the text, you'll see that this was precisely the point he was emphasizing). Certainly, none of us are denying that God is in all living things in a purely abstract sense. They came forth from Him, and His signature can clearly be seen in those things which are made (Rom. 1:20). But to say that Paul was telling unconverted idolaters that they were already the seed of the Most High, and filled with His Spirit, would be totally inaccurate, to say the least. Not only would he have been contradicting what John said, but also what he himself had previously said on numerous occasions (and, in doing so, would have brought himself under a self-declared anathema; Gal. 1:6-9).

Eph. 4:3-6 is another passage which has been swarmed by the locusts, and used to promote inclusivism. It says, "*...endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and though all, and in you all.*"

Now, the way this has been reinterpreted is to say that there is no such thing as the Christian faith, the Buddhist faith, the Hindu faith, etc. There is but one faith, which is commonly shared by all sincere worshipers everywhere. Any differentiation which might seem to exist is but an illusion of the mind, and the invention of men. After all (they say), this passage says that there is but one God, who is the Father of all men, and who is *in* all men, irrespective of race, creed, ethnicity, or religion. But again we ask, is this how the author intended for his words to be understood?

For years, now, preachers have used this passage to say that there is no such thing as the Baptist faith, the Methodist faith, the Pentecostal faith, etc. And, within the context of Christendom, they were correct in the way they used it. There *is* but one faith, and only one by which we live: and that is the faith of the Son of God (Gal. 2:20). God's intention has always been that His people be "a holy nation" (I Peter), not thousands of feuding *denomi*-nations. The same is true concerning one body: "*For by one Spirit are we all (speaking specifically to believers) baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.*" (I Cor. 12:13). Issues of race, gender, or social status cannot alter the fact that we are one by the Spirit. But whenever you try to stretch this to include foreign religions, and / or those who worship within those religious traditions, it becomes a grievously false statement, and lacking any form of application whatsoever. You see, Paul was speaking directly to "the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord" (I Cor. 1:2). And the unity of the Spirit that he was referring to was not a unity which is to be expected among mankind in general at the present time. It's one which solely exists among those who have been baptized into the body of Christ, through the agency of the Holy Spirit.

Need we remind you that there are (still) two men in the earth? The first man Adam is "of the earth, earthy"; the last man is the Lord from heaven (I Cor.15:47). The first man became the head of the entire human race, when he multiplied, and filled the earth with his own kind (fallen man). The second Man is also a corporate Man, having a body which is made up of many individual members (I Cor. 12:12). With the exception of Jesus, every individual who has ever come into this world has entered as a member of the first man. And every individual has experienced what it is like to have Adam as his or her head. It is an inescapable fact of life! However, Jesus revealed the way whereby men may "dis-member" themselves from the man of dust, and be "re-membered" in the Christ body, when He told Nicodemus: "*Marvel not that I said unto thee, YE MUST BE BORN AGAIN*" (John 3:7). Until this definite act of regeneration occurs in the life of an individual, he or she remains in Adam!

With this in mind, then, we can see why there can be no unity, no oneness of Spirit in vision or in purpose among all the people of the world. It's because all are not partakers of the selfsame Spirit. It's as simple as that! In fact, God commands that we abandon all ecumenical efforts with those who are not of the household of faith: "*Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? And what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? ...Wherefore, come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be My sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty*" (II Cor. 6:14-18). No doubt, this attitude may be deemed "politically incorrect" by those of carnal minds. And many may consider it to be divisive, bigoted, and intolerant. But unless you just want to scrap it from the scriptures (as many have opted to do), it's still the undeniable, unchangeable, irreproachable Word of God!

In spite of how some might want to see it, it's important that we understand how God views worship offered by those in other religions. "*But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, **they sacrifice to devils, and not to God:** and I would not that ye have fellowship with devils*" (I Cor. 10:20). (Again, some recite Paul's words on Mars Hill to show that those who were worshiping "the unknown God" were actually worshiping Jesus in ignorance; and thus conclude that the same holds true for all who are worshipers, regardless of their religious beliefs. However, the situation at Mars Hill was a unique one, in that, while all the other altars in that region had images associated with them, this one to which they were bowing had as yet no god envisioned. It was dedicated simply to "the unknown god", just in case they'd overlooked one. Paul immediately picked up on this, and was able to turn it into an opportunity to proclaim the one true God, and to claim for Him this "unoccupied" altar, you might say. This could not have applied to any of the other altars at which they worshiped.)

One last teaching which we'd like to mention in this message, and one which is directly connected with the teaching dealt with above, has to do with the issue of justification. Since the earliest days of Christianity, the message of justification by faith has been under attack. It has primarily been opposed (and often quite violently) by those who

believe that men can only be justified by the performance of good works. Now, it seems that it is being assaulted from another angle. Faith, to hear some tell it, is not necessarily required *prior* to justification; in fact, it is not necessary at all. All men are justified *apart from faith* (and always *have* been in the mind of God, since the sacrificial Lamb was "*slain from the foundation of the world*"), whether they are aware of it or not. But is this a balanced view from the scriptures?

To address this, we would reverently direct you to Romans chapter 4. Here, we have Paul's account of the imputation of righteousness in the case of Abraham, and the pattern which the apostle would invariably refer back to throughout his writings on the subject of justification. Because Abraham staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, verse 22 says, "*therefore, it was accounted to him for righteousness.*" Verses 23-25 picks up from there, saying, "*Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up because of our offenses, and raised because of our justification*". Clearly, in Abraham's case, the exercise of his faith preceded his being justified in the sight of God. Until he believed God, it was *not* accounted to him for righteousness. The same is true for all who follow in the footsteps of faithful Abraham. Consider, if you will, these passages of scripture...

"But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness" (Rom. 4:5)

"Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ..." (Rom. 5:1)

"...knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ..." (Gal. 2:16)

"Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith..." (Gal. 3:24)

In fact, every place where we found justification or imputed righteousness mentioned in God's Word, it was done so in connection with faith. But someone might object, saying, "that sounds like the teaching of some kind of law!" Well, that's *exactly* what it is! It's what Paul referred to as "the law of faith" (Rom. 3:27); and it's what governs the identification process.

Those who argue that there is no such thing as a sinner outside of the body of Christ tell us, "Was not Jesus '*the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world*'? And, did He not '*take away the sins of the world*'? And doesn't II Cor. 5:19 say that '*God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation*'? If you acknowledge the truth of these scriptures, then, you'll have to admit that whenever God looks at mankind, He must see them without sin." Our response to them is, yes, we agree that He *was* slain before the

foundation of the world. And yes, He *was* made to be sin (more accurately, a sin-offering) for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Christ (II Cor. 5:21). No problem with that. However, that still does not mean that God presently sees all men as being sinless. We must interpret these passages in light of the whole, not just of a select few. As Jesus told the pious Pharisees, "*If ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins*" (Jn. 8:24); as He said to those waiting to stone the woman taken in adultery, "*He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her*" (Jn. 8:7); and, as He said to the woman herself, "*Go and sin no more*" (verse 11); these sayings alone should be enough to show whether or not God recognizes sin in the world. We would ask: why would the wrath of God be revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, if God does not impute sin (Rom. 1:18)? And why is He said to be coming in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ (II Thess. 1:8), if He views all men as already being in a justified state?

And how about the disciples? How did they see the current status of men? When the Philippian jailor asked the all-important question, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved", Paul and Silas had the perfect opportunity to set the record straight. They could have told him, "What do you mean, "*to be saved*"? Wake up and smell the coffee, man! You're already saved!" Instead, they said, "**Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household**" (Acts 16:30-31 NKJV). Please understand, if God holds no man accountable for his sin, then Peter's words in Acts 3:19 would have been totally irrelevant. "*Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord...*" Ah, beloved, we could cite many other passages, which, through a simple examination of the tenses used, would reveal whether or not God views all men as presently being saved. But it would seem that such a rudimentary citation would be unnecessary for students of the Word.

To summarize our position, then, we might say that the work of Christ in justification is a finished work, so far as His sacrificial death and resurrection is concerned. He was delivered up for our offenses, and raised again for our justification. That 's the *legal* side of the matter, and one which cannot be disputed. His sacrifice was sufficient for the sins of the whole world, and was offered once for all (Heb.10:1-14). Thank God, the price will never have to be paid again. But then, there is the *vital* side of the issue. The vital side is that the effects of Christ's work must be personally experienced in the life of each individual, beginning with his or her investment of faith in Him. According to the Scriptures, justification is reckoned to the individual *the moment he believes*, not before. It is appropriated by faith, as a result of having heard the word of God (Rom. 10:17). Then, "*being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*". This is the established order of Scripture, and we would do well to remember it. To teach otherwise would be to circumvent the clearly revealed process, and to lay a stumblingblock in the path of those who would otherwise see the need of salvation.

Brethren, allow us to say this. God's aeonian plan of reconciliation ultimately includes all men. And the invitation is open to everyone, without exclusion, and without exception. But we must remember, "every man in his own order" (I Cor. 15:23). No man comes to

Christ, except the Father draws him. And the Father does the drawing at His own discretion. However, theologically attempting to eradicate the differences which exist between believers and non-believers will not bring us any closer to unification. And it will certainly not hasten the symbolic Day of Atonement (at-one-ment) in its fulfillment. Instead, it can only bring confusion.

While it's true that many who have taken to teaching the above mentioned doctrines have done so with ulterior motives, we acknowledge that this is not the case with all. Some just genuinely desire to incorporate everyone into God's great plan of the ages, and believe that this is the way to do it. They sincerely believe that by seeing God in everyone, they'll have a greater respect for mankind in general. And they believe that by removing the sin factor, all the dualistic distinctions between men (and between men and God, as well) will disappear. But brethren, we can, and *should* have a healthy respect for all men, simply by realizing that all men were created in the image of God. This alone should be sufficient to warrant reverence and honor toward the whole of humanity, without having to deprive them of the opportunity of learning that they need to receive Christ into their hearts as Savior.

Regardless of the reason, it must be realized that inclusivist theology cheapens the gospel. It strips from it the ability to point out man's fallen condition, and it robs it of its potential to transform the listener into a new creation in Christ. But especially when it is preached within the context of postmodern tolerance does it divest it of its power, because it places it within the pantheon of competing religious ideas. The gospel of the Kingdom deserves better than that!

HOW SHOULD WE RESPOND?

In light of what we've considered thus far, how, then, do we combat these "swarming" thoughts, which blanket the landscape like a dark cloud of oppression? And how do we resist the tenets of the "new" tolerance?

Psalm 91 tells us that "*He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.*" It goes on to say that if we will seek refuge in Him, He will keep us from "*the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence*". He will become a Succoth to us, a strong Habitation whereby we can continually resort. In fact, He has promised to tabernacle with us, if we will "*hide ourselves for a moment, until the indignation be overpast*" (Isa. 26:20)! However, we must not confuse hiding in Him with cowering in a corner, or selfishly seeking to preserve ourselves from harm. The sound of alarm in God's holy mount must not be perceived as the call to retreat!

1) First, we should harken to God's instructions: "*Therefore also now, says the Lord, turn and keep on coming to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning [until every hindrance is removed and the broken fellowship is restored]. Rend your hearts and not your garments and return to the Lord, your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness; and He revokes His sentence of evil [when His conditions are met]. Who knows but what He will turn, revoke*

your sentence [of evil] , and leave a blessing behind Him [giving you the means with which to serve Him], even a cereal or meal offering and a drink offering for the Lord, your God?" (Joel 2:12-14, Amplified).

These instructions are given to the priests of the Most High, to provoke each one of them to intercede for the priestcraft, as well as for all of God's people. Furthermore, they are to be seen as corporate instructions, not just as individual ones, directed to those who are guilty. It's not enough to simply say, "I'll not be taken in by this trend. I refuse to be effected by this 'new' tolerance". Just as Nehemiah identified with his people, whenever they were in need of God's assistance, we, too, must take upon ourselves the burden of intercession for all of Christ's body.

2) The second way is to recognize which are the absolutely non-negotiable truths of the Christian faith; and, having identified which they are, to embrace them with unwavering conviction. Mind you, there are some subjects which do not necessarily demand that we all come to agreement. We may differ somewhat in the way we look at them, without allowing those differences to divide us (for instance, how we view eschatology, baptism, etc.). Also, there are certain subjective dealings of the Spirit which may be true for us as individuals, but not necessarily true for everyone in general (these would fall under the category of personal convictions, which are not clearly mandated in Scripture). But there are other things which are absolutely essential to sound doctrine; and are not subject to any private interpretation. We should make these distinctions, and be fully persuaded in our own minds. Don't fall for the line that "since none of us have all the truth, who's to say what's right?" That is purely relativistic thinking, straight from the mind of Adam. (The issue is not whether we have perfect knowledge of all things found in Scripture, but whether there are things which we may embrace with absolute certainty). Also, we should make it a rule to never consider any teaching apart from the foundational principles of the doctrine of Christ, no matter who may be teaching it.

3) The third way is to acquaint yourself with the battle, put on the whole armor of God, and determine to take a stand "in the evil day". In spite of what is being said these days, we are still very much in warfare (a simple review of Joel chapter 3 should reveal this). We are in a "war of worldviews", as Gary DeMar has put it, fighting for the hearts and minds of this generation. This requires that we familiarize ourselves with the issues, and ask God to show us the best way that we can be set for the defense of the Gospel.

We can start by reclaiming words and their meanings, which have been reinterpreted to comply with the postmodern mindset. We can point out the contradictions between what folks are saying, and what they actually mean. Then we can reintroduce these words to society, not only in word (not merely through proper usage), but in deed and in truth.

For instance, the new tolerance is constantly being presented as the true expression of love. But when we take the time to really consider it, we realize that it is actually its antithesis.

What does God's love look like when practiced? Based on Christ's teachings, we are to love the Lord with all our hearts, souls, minds, and strength; and secondly, we are to love our neighbor as ourselves. By this, we understand that our first responsibility is to be totally surrendered unto God, even as was Jesus in the days of His flesh. We are to make the practice of His will our highest priority; because, in doing so, we demonstrate our love for Him (John 14:15). Then, we are to make the health, happiness, and spiritual welfare of other people as important to us as our own. This, too, was demonstrated by Christ when He came to this earth. Seeing the sin-cursed condition of His beloved creation, He became personally involved in its redemption, even to the point of laying down His life for its sake. This, dear friends, is the biblical definition of love. No greater love exists, according to Him who was Love incarnate. And, no matter how we want to look at it, this definition / demonstration necessarily requires involvement.

Postmodern tolerance, on the other hand, encourages indifference. It says, "If you really love people, you'll not impose your beliefs on them. You'll let folks believe what they want to believe, and respect their right to do so." However, because we do love them, we will not stand by idly while they entertain thoughts and actions which we know to be detrimental to their spiritual well-being. When postmodern tolerance says, "If you really love someone, you'll accept them just the way they are, regardless of their beliefs or lifestyles", the love of God in our hearts says, "The issue is not about whether we accept them as persons, but about whether we will tell them the truth which alone will make them free." You see, the love of God demands that we become involved in the lives of others, even at the risk of being rejected by them. Was not this the case with the firstborn Son (Jn. 1:11; Isa. 53:1-12)? It is precisely because we consider them as being worth the trouble that we speak the truth to them in love.

Again, the voice of postmodern tolerance says, "If you really love folks, you wouldn't speak out against what *you* consider to be false teachings, and / or those who teach such things. You'd simply pray for them, and not run the risk of offending them". But the apostle who gave us the single most definitive chapter on love not only denounced false teachings, but publically called their teachers by name (II Tim. 2:16-18). You see, true love considers the effects of erroneous doctrine, how they detrimentally lead people away from Christ. And true love will take measures to protect the young and the innocent in the Lord, "*warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ*" (Col. 1:27). In fact, love will even deliver those who defiantly promote false teachings over to satan, that they might learn not to blaspheme (I Tim. 1:20)! Therefore, for the sake of those who would deceive, and for those who would be deceived by them, the love of God exposes false doctrine for what it really is.

It's our earnest conviction that if the new tolerance is to be overcome, and the northern army removed; if the locust-like inclusivist ideology is driven back in an Eastern direction, and revealed to be the stinking thing that it is (Joel 2:20), it will be because there is a people who have understood, and have thus recaptured the true meaning of love. This shall be the beginning of a counter-cultural revolution, which shall consummate in righteousness (II Peter 3:13)!

THE BRIGHT SIDE

Before we draw this message to its conclusion, we would add this. We'd mentioned in the first article that there were two main reasons why we believed Joel's prophecy had relevance in our day. If you recall, the first reason had to do with the types of crops which were mentioned in chapter one. These were the final harvests, which were gathered at the end of the agricultural year. The second reason is found through an examination of Peter's recital in Acts 2:14-21. When Peter stood on the Day of Pentecost, he said, "*These men are not drunk as ye suppose, but this is that which was prophesied by the prophet Joel, 'In the last days, saith the Lord, I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh..'*" Twice he repeated it, both times quoting it the same way... "*I will pour out OF My Spirit*". However, if you'll notice, when Joel originally uttered these lines, there was no mention of the word, "*of*". He simply said, "*I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh...*". Is there a difference? Most certainly there is! You see, if we were to pour out *of* a pitcher of water, that would mean that we would pour out only a portion of its contents. But if we were to pour out the water contained within a pitcher, that would mean that we would pour out the entirety of its contents. Therefore, when Peter said, "*this is that*", when describing that which had transpired on the Day of Pentecost, he was telling the truth. *IT WAS THAT*. It just wasn't ALL of that!

Beloved, there is an outpouring that has yet to be seen. There is an event which shall totally eclipse that which transpired on the Day of Pentecost. There is a fullness, and an abundance unlike anything witnessed throughout history, that has been reserved for the latter days. And, the amazing thing about it is, we can hasten it in its fulfillment!

The scenario created in Joel's prophecy is not meant to be depressing...it's meant to stir a people to seek after God! Oh, if we will but heed these words, see the seriousness of the situation, and cry out to God for deliverance, the Lord has promised to restore the wasted years. He will send the rain, the former and the latter in the first month, to replenish the harvest, and to bring it to full maturity and stature. And He will restore our land to its original Edenic state, where we can once again walk and talk with Him in the Spirit of the Day. Only we must understand that we have an obligation to comply with His conditions. The restoration of which we speak will not come automatically!

We're confident that there will be a people who stand in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein (Jer. 6:16). Because of their perseverance, and because of their "bulldog" tenacity to hold out for truth, they'll appoint unto creation the oil of joy for mourning, the garments of praise for the spirit of heaviness (Isa. 61:3). They'll be called the true priests of the Lord, and will build the old wastes. And they'll raise up the former desolations, the desolations of many generations (verses 4 & 6). Therefore, let each of us purpose to be among that prestigious number. A great deal rests upon that endeavor!

A whole other message could be written about chapter three... and the multitudes whom God will gather into the valley of decision...the Valley of Jehoshaphat (Jehovah-judged). Suffice it to say that despite the fact that our postmodern, relativistic society says that it's

unnecessary to make any absolute and final decisions concerning life and religion, that's exactly what the Lord is requiring. The main decision facing the nations is the same that has been for the past two thousand years—basically, to repent, and believe the gospel (Mk. 1:15). Everything else hinges upon that.

Times may change...but God never does. While once He winked at the times of ignorance, He now commands all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30). This is not an option, nor is it a suggestion. It's what He commands! Why then should we present it any other way?

There is one good thing that has come out of all this, though. The current cultural trend has provided a unique opportunity to share the message of God's eonian purpose in a loving, balanced, scriptural and sensible manner, to a world that is ripe for it. On the other hand, if we attempt to share it from a postmodern perspective (that is, devoid of any concept of judgment), we can only prolong the problem, and further confuse folks concerning what God expects of them. So let us "quit ye like men" in the Spirit, and be faithful to remind all men everywhere that there is but one way to be reconciled to God—and His name is JESUS! This alone shall bring about the worldwide oneness we all so earnestly long for, and usher in the true fulfillment of Tabernacles!

Praise God!

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