

## Overcoming Religious Violence with Tolerance and Prudence

Today many think that religion is evil and religion motivates people towards violence, conflict, oppression, discrimination, animosity and intolerance. Not necessarily atheists, even believers agree to the fact that religion caused so much of damage in the past. That does not mean that religion can be totally neglected. Religion can generate great personal commitment and passion, expressed as caring, love, respect, and support for others. It can motivate believers to dedicate their lives to the alleviation of suffering and need. Did God make religion or it is manmade? Is religion required to go to heaven? Does religion lead to freedom or bondage? Do we follow religion or God? Do we need to be part of a religious group to serve God? These are some of the unanswered questions among people today. On the other hand, every day we hear about religious violence, terrorism by religious groups, religious corruption, holy war, religious racism, etc. keep millions away from following any religion. [1] According to American Religion Identification Survey, ARIS 2008, 86% of American adults identified as Christians in 1990 is reduced to 76% in 2008. The "Nones" (no stated religious preference, atheist, or agnostic) Continue to grow, though at a much slower pace than in the 1990s, from 8.2% in 1990, to 14.1% in 2001, to 15.0% in 2008. These figures indicate a major decline of the religious followers as America is considered as one of the religious countries of the world. The reason for the negative effect of religion among people is not known. But one thing certain is that there is a greater damage caused by religion in the past and during the present.

If we analyze the possible causes of such effect of religion in the society, one could easily arrive at the following.

1. Motivation and teaching at the religious centers.
2. Devotees of wrongly interpreted and understood doctrine of religion
3. Ministers who preach the religion and not live according to what they preach
4. Teaching in schools and society regarding atheism, agnosticism and skepticism
5. Effort towards scientifically disprove the existence of God
6. Religious groups actively involved in mass conversion.
7. Political influences behind these religious groups
8. Anti social groups hiding behind the blanket of religion

If these causes can be eliminated from the world, there is no doubt that near 100% of the world population will follow one or other religion.

In this article, I would like to address the challenges of Christians who would press on and obey the call of God to go and preach the gospel to every creature (Part-3). This is a sacred moment Christians should move with much prudence. Any wrong move in this direction that is apparently seen as "forced Christianity" will cause disturbance and damage to the communal harmony. Also it would be appropriate to address the issue by making references to historical religious violence (Part-1) as well as the concept of religious tolerance (Part-2).

## Part 1: Historical instances of religiously motivated violence

[2] A man told his grandson: "A terrible fight is going on inside me -- a fight between two wolves. One is evil, and represents hate, anger, arrogance, intolerance, and superiority. The other is good, and represents joy, peace, love, tolerance, understanding, humility, kindness, empathy, generosity, and compassion. This same fight is going on inside you, inside every other person too." The grandson then asked: "Which wolf will win?" The old man replied simply: "The one you feed." - Anon.

This is certainly true. Generations after generations this wolf has been fed and the evil of "Religion" has gone so much into the human blood stream. Today this cannot be dialyzed from the minds and even the little ones are affected by this contagious nature. Let us understand why there is so much religiously-based conflict, oppression and discrimination.

- To our knowledge, no Atheist has ever committed suicide & mass murder by intentionally flying an airplane into a building, or blowing up a subway, or exploding a bomb in a crowded marketplace. But many people have done these things, motivated by their religious faith.
- Municipalities have voted to turn down a building permit for a mosque or Muslim cemetery, while approving a construction of a church.
- Most Americans do not consider race, gender, sexual orientation, age, or a history of multiple marriages to be much of an impediment for a presidential candidate. But most people would not vote for a generally well-qualified Atheist.
- Many people are motivated to adopt a religious faith out of a need for security in a dangerous world. When their religion is challenged, they react emotionally and sometimes violently.
- Religious beliefs are largely based on faith rather than reason. This means that conflicts among religions cannot be easily settled through dialogue. Disagreements can often escalate.
- Many people believe that there is only one "top-down" religion: i.e. there is only a single religion revealed by God to humanity. That sole religion is, of course, their own. Meanwhile they believe that all other religions are "bottom-up" faiths: i.e. religions created by humans to express their concept of God. It is difficult for a person to respect other religions if they "know" that their religion, alone, is the true one.
- Many feel that they are God's only representatives on Earth; in effect, they are God's arms and legs. They feel a need to be God's defenders

There are no quick fixes to this situation.

[3] Religion, it seems, is responsible for most of the conflicts around the world. As Lucretius, the Epicurean Roman poet of the century B.C., put it, “*Religion can incite so much evil*”. There are days when almost every headline in the morning paper attests to the social costs of religious faith, and the nightly news seems miraculously broadcast from the fourteenth century...There are daily reports of pious massacres in Iraq...For anyone with eyes to see, there can be no doubt that religious faith remains a perpetual source of human conflict. Though many wars in human history have been caused mostly by religious differences, many more have been caused by the things that religion, for the most part, keeps in check: greed, pride, revenge, inhuman, godless ideologies and disdain for the well-being of others. That being so, it is not clear that sweeping religious faith aside would be the gateway into a more powerful world.

Four bloodiest conflicts in human history have all taken place in relatively recent times. The most lethal conflict was World War II, which claimed between fifty and sixty million lives (Precise figures are impossible, and even approximations remain disputed, though they fall generally within this range.) The second costliest, in terms of loss of life, was the T'ai-Ping rebellion in China, from 1850 to 1864, in which the dead may have numbered somewhere around twenty million. World War I inflicted perhaps fifteen million dead: around eight and half million in battle and perhaps another six and half million civilians, though, again, estimates vary. And the fourth was the Russian Civil War, which followed in the wake of Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. Estimates of the number of casualties in that conflict continue to differ enormously, and even definitions are problematic, but around nine million seems to be the safest figure. The claim, therefore, that the wars of secular modernity were bloodier because they were essentially secular seems almost irresistible. Secularism, it seems, has caused far worse conflicts than has religion.

That doesn't mean that we can underestimate the effect of Religion on Global Peace. Let us review some of the damages religion caused in the past.

[4] During the last few decades:

1. The murder of 3,000 people in the 9/11 attacks by Islamic terrorists.
2. 60,000 people killed in Iraq by the combination of Christian-fueled rage in the US and civil war between Sunnis and Shiites.
3. Long term war in Yugoslavia.
4. Long term war in Ireland
5. Judaism used as an excuse to seize land and discriminate against Palestinian people
6. Celibacy for Catholic priests leading to repeated and prolonged sexual abuse of boys by men who are confused about their sexual existence.

[5] September 11, 2001 was the kind of morning when everything seemed right with the world. At 7.45 am, American Airlines flight 11 left Boston for Los Angeles, followed thirteen minutes later by United Airlines flight 175, which had the same destination. Within three minutes, United Airlines flight 93 left Newark for San Francisco. At 8:10

am, American flight 77 left Washington's Dulles Airport for Los Angeles. Armed with boxcutters and knives, the men quickly seized control of the four planes and steered them to their targets in Manhattan and Washington. In a little more than an hour, more than five thousand Americans perished; the most catastrophic act of terrorism in the history of the United States. And Americans were not the only victims of this unimaginable crime. Also killed were men and women from more than fifty other countries, among them Great Britain, which, having lost more than two hundred of its citizen, had experienced the most deadly act of terrorism in its history too.

The dual attacks in New York and Washington were the deadliest salvo in Osama bin Laden's holy war against the United States – a war that had begun almost a decade earlier with the little noticed bombing of a Yemen hotel that housed American Soldiers. Although September attacks came as an utter surprise, there had been indications that bin Laden was planning to strike the United States during the summer of 2001. The clearest signal that bin Laden plotted more attacks against American targets was a skillfully edited two-hour al-Qaeda recruitment tape that circulated widely in the Middle East during the summer-in keeping with bin Laden's pattern of subtly telegraphing his intentions.

On the tape, bin Laden and his closest advisers make impassioned speeches about Muslims being attacked in Chechnya, Kashmir, Iraq, Israel, Lebanon, Indonesia, and Egypt – speeches that are laid over graphic footage Muslims being killed, beaten, and imprisoned. For bin Laden, however, the greatest insult to Muslims remains the continued presence of Americans in the holy land of Arabia. “These Americans brought...Jewish women who can go anywhere in our holy land.” He says. Jewish women who can go anywhere in our holy land he says. The charge that “Arab rulers worship the God of the White House” is made over images of the Saudi royal family meeting American leaders such as Colin Powell.

“If you don't fight,” says bin Laden, “you will be punished by God.” The Saudi exile then outlines the solution to the problems Muslims face: They should travel to Afghanistan to be tutored in the arts of holy war. The tape shows a hundred or so of bin Laden's masked followers training at his al-Farooq camp in eastern Afghanistan, holding up black flags and chanting in Arabic, “Fight evil!” The fighters shoot off anti-aircraft guns and RPGs, run across obstacle courses, and blow up buildings; bin Laden himself lets off some rounds from an automatic rifle. The tape also shows, on the same obstacle courses, dozens of young boys, many no older than eleven, dressed in military camouflage and firing weapons. Toward the tape's end, bin Laden implies that there will be more actions against the United States: “The victory of Islam is coming. And the victory of Yemen will continue.”

[6] Dr. Kimball in his book *When Religion Becomes Evil* discusses five warning signs of corruption in a religion: Absolute truth claims, blind obedience, establishing the "ideal" time, the end justifies any means, and declaring holy war. In reviewing these signs, Dr. Kimball gives examples from history and current affairs.

Absolute truth claims are comforting to some who feel that what's right for them is by definition what's right. There are radical Christians, in Dr. Kimball's examples, who believe all other religions are false. This arrogance has led them to target Jews, Hindus and Muslims for missionary visits on important religious holidays. Kimball describes this practice of trying to convert Jews on the high holy days as being insulting and more of a spiritual attack than a true attempt to share the Christian message. However, Christians are not alone in having extremists who believe that their principles are superior. Most of the world's major religions have subgroups exhibiting claims that they and they alone know the truth. The results have ranged from merely annoying to serious mistreatment of non-believing neighbors in the name of God.

Blind obedience is another danger signal. Checking your intelligence and common sense at the door can lead to situations like the Jim Jones tragedy, where nine hundred believers followed their charismatic leader to Guiana where they committed mass suicide at his command. Dr. Kimball warns against uncritical acceptance of any popular belief -- especially if it advocates violence.

Establishing the ideal time presumes that better times are coming. People are awaiting Armageddon, the Antichrist, the second coming of Christ, the end of the world, the end of time, etc. There are those who try to bring about an Islamic state or a Jewish state or even a Christian state by gaining control of the government so that religious precepts become the law of the land. Dr. Kimball cites the Taliban in Afghanistan as an example of this behavior. Based on narrow interpretations of the *Quran*, morality police punished people for small infractions of Islamic law with beatings, mutilations and death. Kimball also warns of right-wing Christian sects in the United States who wish to impose their radical sense of morality on the general population, and who have established a political agenda to achieve those goals.

The end justifying any means was recently demonstrated in a series of suicide bombings in Israel as an expression of racial and political hatred fed by religious fervor. Fanatics murder doctors while protesting abortions. The hijacking of four airlines on September 11, 2001, by Muslim radicals who crashed them into major U.S. buildings and landmarks was another example of this philosophy.

Declaring a Holy War is the final sign. Dr. Kimball points to the recent conflict between Muslims and Hindus over the politically sensitive area of Kashmir. There is the ongoing fight between Palestinians and Israelis over the Holy Land. Furious with American's role in the Gulf War, Osama Bin Laden launched a jihad that resulted in the deaths of many innocent people. George Bush feels justified in his search for the "evildoers". Dr. Kimball discusses the lengths people go to square the concept of war with their religious tenets. First, there is the "just" war, which implies that believers are morally justified in participation due to the noble nature of their cause. This type of warfare is usually a defensive battle where the participants have a good chance of winning without excessive casualties on either side. A second type of war is a "crusade", where people feel that attacking others is sanctioned by God and supported by their own righteousness.

## Part 2: Religious tolerance and cooperation

“Men will wrangle for religion, write for it, fight for it, die for it, anything but live for it.” - Charles Caleb Cotton

[2] Religious tolerance is defined as allowing followers of other religions to follow their spiritual beliefs without oppression or discrimination. Religious tolerance is a fundamental right in a democracy. Most people believe that religious tolerance, using this definition, is a noble goal, and vitally necessary for world peace.

The meaning of the term “religious tolerance” does not involve,

- Believing that all religions are the same.
- Believing that all sets of religious beliefs are equally true.
- Believing that all faiths are equally beneficial and equally harmless to society.
- Believing that all religious groups are equally beneficial and equally harmless to their followers
- Refraining from criticizing religious practices of others.
- Refraining from talking about your beliefs to others.
- Ignoring your own religious ideas.

The meaning of the term “religious tolerance” does involve,

- Accepting that followers of various religions consider their own beliefs to be true
- Allowing others to hold religious beliefs that are different from yours.
- Allowing others to freely change their religion, or denomination or beliefs.
- Allowing others to practice their religious faith, within reasonable limits.
- Refusing to discriminate in employment, accommodation etc. on religious grounds.
- Making a reasonable effort to accommodate other people's religious needs.

### **Religious tolerance of all religions:**

[7] Every religion in this world talks about religious tolerance.

#### The Holy Bible

"You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD." -YHWH, Leviticus 19:18

"Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets." -Yahshua, Matthew 7:12 “

You shall love your neighbor as yourself." -Yahshua, Matthew 22:39

#### Bahá'í

"Blessed is he who preferreth his brother before himself. " -Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, 71

#### Buddhism

"Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful." -Udana-Varga, 5:18

#### Christianity

"Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets." -Yahshua, Matthew 7:12

#### Confucianism

"Do not unto others what you would not have them do unto you." -Analects 15:23

#### Hinduism

"This is the sum of duty: Do naught unto others which would cause you pain if done to you." -Mahabharata 5:1517

#### Islam

"No one of you is a believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself." -Sunnab

#### Jainism

"In happiness and suffering, in joy and grief, we should regard all creatures as we regard our own self." -Lord Mahavir 24th Tirthankara

#### Judaism

"What is hateful to you, do not to your fellow man. That is the entire law: all the rest is commentary." -Talmud, Shabbat 31a

#### Native American

"Respect for all life is the foundation." -The Great Law of Peace

#### Sikhism

"Do not create enmity with anyone as God is within everyone." -Guru Arjan Devji 259. Guru Granth Sahib

#### Utilitarianism

"To do as one would be done by, and to love one's neighbor as one's self, constitute the ideal perfection of utilitarian morality." -John Stuart Mill

#### Zoroastrianism

"That nature only is good when it shall not do unto another whatever is not good for its own self." -Dadistan-i-Dinik, 94:5

#### Notable Quotes

"We should behave to friends as we would wish friends to behave to us." - Aristotle

"Do not do to others what would anger you if done to you by others." - Socrates

"Every man takes care that his neighbor does not cheat him. But the day comes when he begins to care that he does not cheat his neighbor. Then all goes well."- Ralph Waldo Emerson

### **Religious tolerance of Christ and His followers**

Tolerance of other types of "Christianity": (Mark 9:38-40, Luke 9:49-50) Jesus' disciples had rejected a healer who was exorcising demons in Jesus' name, yet was not one of Jesus' direct followers. Jesus criticized his disciples and accepted the healer.

Jesus refused to curse non-believers: (Luke 9:52-56) Jesus' teachings were rejected by the inhabitants of a village in Samaria. His disciples asked that he exterminate the people of the village by issuing a curse. Jesus refused to do it, and simply move on to the next village.

Jesus treats a Samaritan women with respect: (John 4:7-27:) Jesus initiated a conversation with a Samaritan woman in Sychar, Samaria. This is unusual in at least two ways: Jewish

men did not talk to women who were not their wives or were not from their family. Also, Jews normally treated Samaritans with contempt. Jews did not have dealings with them, because they had deviated from Judaism.

Christians treating Jews with respect: (Acts 17:10-13) The author of Luke and Acts comments that the Jews in Berea were more noble, fair-minded and receptive than the Jews of Thessalonica.

Tolerance of Pagans towards Christians: (Acts 28:30-31 ) Paul was under house arrest in Rome for two years. The government granted him religious freedom and did not forbid him to preach.

Acceptance of non-Christians into Heaven: (Romans 2:14-16) An often preached message by conservative Protestants is that the only way to be saved and attain Heaven after death is to repent of one's sins and trust Jesus as Lord and Savior. One corollary of this view is that only those persons who hear the Gospel and accept it will spend eternity in Heaven.

Tolerance of fellow Christians: (Romans 14:1-23) St. Paul commented on the range of beliefs among Christians. It was not unlike the variety of beliefs and practices seen among Christian denominations today. He called for intra-faith harmony. Paul urged believers to be tolerant of others who may follow different dietary rules, or hold religious services on a different day. He recommends that believers avoid doing anything that might make a fellow believer stumble in this faith.

Avoid offending followers of other religions: (1 Corinthians 10:31-32) St. Paul commented on the dietary habits of Christians.

### **Some of the well prepared videos promoting religious tolerance:**

#### Promoting Religious Tolerance

"Another one of those school project videos. This one was for my Cultural Studies Class. We were to select a hot political topic and create a basic public service announcement type of movie. I chose religious freedom. Enjoy."

Link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dcovjfru1H8>

#### Respect the Religious Beliefs of Others

"Tolerance is a good cornerstone on which to build human relationships. When one views the slaughter and suffering caused by religious intolerance throughout all the history of man and into modern times, one can see that intolerance is a very non-survival activity. Religious tolerance does not mean one cannot express his own beliefs. It does mean that seeking to undermine or attack the religious faith and beliefs of another has always been a short road to trouble. The principles found in The Way to Happiness book are grounded in common sense and written for application. This book is a truly practical and modern guide that anyone can use to confidently steer their way to a happier, more successful life."

Link: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YFDBLZl\\_9xw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YFDBLZl_9xw)

"Religious Tolerance: The Golden Rule"

This video features Jewish, Hindu, Sikh, Native Spirituality, Islam, Wicca, and Christian images. It is a video made for class that shows different religions' takes on "the golden rule". Images are from Flickr.com Song is "Wisdom" by Delerium."

Link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zytXVYr6Imw>

"Tolerance PSA: 'Dear Parents':"

An open message to parents on the concept of tolerance.

Link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qLIW8JWk1RI>

The Only One Evanescence Religious Tolerance is needed!!

Religious Tolerance is needed! We are all one! Connected by our Creator. We are ALL children of our Creator and we are all made from the same Divine light and energy. Remember that and you remember God!!!..."

Link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GghYd11IGVg>

### Part 3: Religious prudence and preaching the Gospel

The most important aspect one should know is that Christianity is not a Religion. Christianity cannot be compared to other religions of the world. According to Webster's dictionary, Christian is the one who professes beliefs in the teachings of Jesus. Whereas religion according to the same dictionary is

- The service or worship of God or the supernatural.
- Commitment or devotion to religious faith or observance.
- A personal set or institutionalized system of religious attitudes, beliefs and attitudes.

Christianity is not just a religion, it is a faith walk. We are not interested in religion, but we are deeply interested in the Gospel. Following are few of the differences between religion and the Gospel.

- I wouldn't walk across the street for religion, but I am willing to go around the world for the gospel. What is the difference!?
- Religion is man-made; the gospel is God-given.
- Religion is what man does for God; the gospel is what God does for man.
- Religion is man's search for God; the gospel is God's search for man.
- Religion is man trying to climb the ladder of his own self- righteousness, with the hope of meeting God on the top rung; the gospel is God coming down the ladder in the incarnation of Jesus Christ and meeting a world of sinners at the lowest rung.
- Religion is good views; the gospel is good news.
- Religion is good advice; the gospel is a glorious announcement.
- Religion takes a man and leaves him as he is; the gospel takes a man as he is and makes him what he ought to be.
- Religion leads to an outer reformation; the gospel leads to an inner transformation.

- Religion whitewashes; the gospel washes white.
- Religion can become a farce; the gospel is a powerful force, the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes.

Every Christian who is involved in preaching the Gospel should be aware of this fact. The Old Testament era of Christianity probably would make us to consider Christianity as a religion due to the beliefs and practices, especially concept such as “Holy War”. It was true that God destroyed all evil doers and idol worshippers from the face of the earth and gave their land as a possession to His own children. But during the New Testament era Jesus came to end all these Old Testament rituals and practices. Jesus came down to establish His kingdom not by violence but by love. Anyone who is involved in advancing His kingdom should not conform to the standards of the worldly religions. Following are some of the essential aspects any Christian should understand and conform with in order to preach the Gospel. These principles will make one prudent and vigilant to face the enemy, who is not only the devil himself but also his agencies operating on the earth opposing the Gospel.

### **1. Christianity is established on the basis of Love**

Father’s love gave Jesus to this world, John 3:16. Jesus’ love made Him to walk in humility and endure the cruel death on the cross. Every Christian is called to love the Lord and their neighbor as they love themselves, Mathew 22:37-39. [8] The ultimate test of a Christian's love is to follow the Master and give his life for love of him and for his bride, the Church. By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren, 1 John 3:16. St. Paul endangered his life many times in preaching Jesus, before the Romans beheaded him near the Tiber. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fasting often, in cold and nakedness— besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation? 2 Corinthians 11:24-29.

And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us, Romans 5:3-5. All of the Apostles except St. John, who had resisted fear to remain with Jesus in his crucifixion, were martyred. St. Peter was crucified upside-down on the Vatican Hill, where his body was buried and remains. St. James was beheaded by Herod in Jerusalem. St. Nathaniel was killed by having the skin flayed off his body. The life and death of each Apostle testifies that he preached and wrote of Jesus' Gospel not for anything worldly such as glory, riches or pleasure, but simply because of the Gospel's truth.

Christianity is the religion of love. Only in Christianity does God reveal himself to the world by becoming himself human and giving himself to us completely, even to a brutal, ignominious death. Other religions profess belief in God or a divine principle and extol sacrifice, but in no other religion does God show his love by handing himself over to his creatures as an example of love.

The heart of Christianity is the heart of Jesus Christ, which is both human and divine. Without Christ's love, life is selfishness and decay, and man can have no peace within himself. Without love there is only loneliness. With love, men can enter into communion with each other to build true unity and lasting peace. The centrality of love in the Christian religion is its greatness and the simplest way to know its truth. Look within yourself and ask, "Do I want to love? Do I want to want to love?"

## **2. Jesus is the only way**

Gospel needs to be preached with much prudence as we cannot compromise the fact that Jesus is the only way to heaven. Today every religion talks great about their own and confidently teaches that their God is the only way to heaven. In the midst of this self-demanding struggle of each religion, Christians should stand as a witness for the Gospel of Jesus Christ and declare that Jesus is the only way. Jesus said to him, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me, John 14:6. We need to have a strong unshakable faith on Jesus as He is the only way. In the same time we should be able to communicate this fact to people belong to other religion without hurting their religious feelings. We need to be aware of the fact that Jesus is the only way of salvation because He is the only One who can pay our sin penalty, Romans 6:23. No other religion teaches the depth or seriousness of sin and its consequences. No other religion offers the infinite payment of sin that only Jesus Christ could provide. No other "religious founder" was God become man, John 1:1,14 – the only way an infinite debt could be paid. Jesus had to be God so that He could pay our debt. Jesus had to be man so He could die. Salvation is available only through faith in Jesus Christ! "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved", Acts 4:12.

## **3. Our concern is souls, not establishing a religion**

Jesus came to this world not to establish a religion. Jesus came to this earth to seek and save the lost, Luke 19:10. This is a truth needs to be strongly rooted in the minds of all Christians. It should be more evident for people belong to other religions that Christians are not interested in establishing their religion rather they work towards establishing eternal life. Jesus said in John 10:10, the thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have *it* more abundantly. That does not mean that we don't care about life in this earth. No, we do care about the people who are in need. But more than meeting their earthly needs, we make sure they are eligible to enter into the Kingdom of God, the life eternal.

#### **4. We are in war with the devil, not with devotes of other religion**

Ephesians 6:12 clearly states that for we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Our enemy has the spiritual realm, a being we sometimes call Satan. Christians, those who have had a "born from above" experience in our lives, are at war with this spiritual enemy, whether we want to be or not. Those who are unsaved, including millions who go by the name of Christian, but who have never had their sins come under the blood of the Son of God, are not called into this fight. They cannot fight, since they are prisoners of this spiritual authority and prisoners of war cannot fight. That is why churches are in constant fight with the devil to bring deliverance to this spiritually bonded people.

The enemy comes in many forms. He deceives millions in this world saying that he is God. He establishes himself when people worship him. He loves to be worshipped. When people worship an idol and say mantras, this deceiver manifests himself. People fall into this deception believing that it is the manifestation of God as it is supernatural. Bible says in 2 Corinthians 2:11, lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices. A true Christian cannot keep quite seeing the deception of Satan. He comes against such demonic activities in the name of Jesus and binds the powers of darkness. But remember, we love the people who worship him but not him. We are concerned about their soul as they are marked for the eternal fire as long as they worship him. Every Christian is a soldier fighting against the enemy who is our adversary the devil himself for the deliverance of the people who are kept in bondage by his manifestation, false appearance, false teaching and deceiving power. This is not a Holy War. No bloodshed or no assassination in this war. This is a war that takes place in the spiritual realms. Every walk of our life should communicate the following to this world in order to effectively preach the Gospel.

- We love the people who belong to the other religions
- We respect their devotion to their God
- We cannot compromise as Jesus is the only way to the Father
- We are concerned about them as they live in the darkness
- The gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing
- Whose minds the god of this age has blinded,
- The light of the gospel of the glory of Christ should shine on them.
- The adversary is the god of this age, the devil to whom we are in war with and we destroy his powers by the power of the Gospel and advance the kingdom of God.

#### **5. Have a passion for mission**

[9] Paul says, "I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise. So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek," Romans 1:14-16. Witnessing for Christ is becoming more difficult these days. To be modern means to be tolerant, keeping religion within your personal sphere. The pressure on individuals to be modern or post-modern, secular or multi-cultural and tolerant is great and it is considered fashionable. Opposition, threat and persecution have become normative in many

countries today. The time in which Paul lived was no different. The Roman political power structure and Jewish religious power structure were against the young church. But these structures and strictures did not undermine Paul's determination. His passion to share the Gospel is evident in his writings and his accomplishments as a church planter. When he wrote to Roman Christians, who lived in the then global superpower political headquarters, he makes three statements that are relevant for us even today.

I am obligated: Paul writes he is obliged or bound to preach the Gospel, Christians are made free from sin, the world, death and Satan through Jesus Christ, but have become bond-slaves voluntarily – a bond-slave for the sake of the Kingdom of God. A slave forsakes or foregoes his talents, time, treasure, desires, aspirations and will and lives for the master. The will of slaves is surrendered and the will of the master becomes the rule of life. Paul was not a forced laborer of the Gospel but a volunteer for the Gospel. God expects each Christian to be a volunteer for the sake of the Gospel.

I am eager: Eagerness means there is a sense of urgency. Paul writes that he is eager to preach the Gospel. Paul was compelled and motivated by the love of Christ to communicate the Gospel. The same wonderful love of Jesus Christ that made Him leave heaven to dwell on the earth so humanity could be saved is at work in the lives of Christians. That inspires them to follow the Master in making sacrifices for the furtherance of Gospel.

I am not ashamed: Paul declares that he is not ashamed of the gospel. The Gospel is like dynamite that can transform human beings beyond all human calculations. It is neither a legend, nor myth, nor empty words but God's loving communication of His plan of redemption for all of humanity. The Gospel embraces the whole humanity into God's Kingdom. Nobody will lose anything by hearing the Gospel; rather they will gain the free gift of God – salvation. The people who understand the Gospel do not find any valid reason to reject it.

## **6. Mission crosses barriers**

Today man creates religious boundaries around him and says that this region belongs to such and such a religion. This religious separation in terms of region augments other barriers based on ethnicity, language and economy. But Jesus is not God of one region or ethnicity or language. Jesus came for the whole world. He died for the salvation of all mankind. So much so the Gospel is not bound to one region. The Gospel penetrates through the barriers of religion, ethnicity, linguistic, regional and economic. [9] In Luke 10:30-34, Jesus spoke a parable of certain Samaritan helping a man who was beaten up and left half-dead by robbers and passed by a Priest and a Levite. This is an apt illustration of the mission crossing barriers. Like this Samaritan, Christians are expected to cross at least the following five barriers to evangelize people. Evangelism or mission is to a person who is wounded, dying or perishing, who is in danger zone and who is marginalized.

Religious barriers: The Samaritan transcended religious barriers. The priest, who was a teacher, a bench mark of reference for ethical issues, and protector of moral values, failed

miserably. The most probable reason was his religious beliefs. He thought that the injured person could defile or pollute his holy calling or ministry. As a representative of God, he failed to display the divine nature of love and compassion. As a leader in the community, he did not set an example by his behavior.

Ethnic barriers: The most probable reason for the negligent attitude of the Levite could be the ethnic considerations. The Levites considered themselves above the community, because of their sacred and holy vocation. They claimed moral high ground and ceremonial purity. The injured person was not a Levite. So why bother about a person who is lesser in the social status.

Linguistic barriers: The Jewish people spoke Aramaic, the common language, and Hebrew, the sacred language. But the Samaritans spoke a different language that was considered as half-breed or corrupted. The Priest and the Levite could speak the same language, but they simply ignored the person. Gift of language is the greatest gift for mankind in the whole creation. How much it is misused and abused.

Regional barriers: Samaria was a different country. The Good Samaritan was a refugee or a visitor to Israel. As an alien, it was not his obligation to do that kind of help to the victim on a highway. The spirit of regionalism and parochial mentality was not found in him. He transcended the regional barriers to help this helpless man. In evangelism this barrier is breached.

Economy Barriers: The victim may not have been a rich person. Most probably he would have had meager possessions and he tried to protect his wages. He did not own an animal like the Good Samaritan so he was on foot. But the Good Samaritan had the capacity to pay for all his medical expenses and the recuperation time in the inn. Evangelism touches the poor and needy. Tabitha helped the widows, poor and needy. Evangelism reaches the under-privileged, marginalized, dispossessed, neglected, poor, widows and orphans.

## Conclusion:

Religion is not evil, religious violence is evil. Every human, especially every Christian is responsible to prevent religious violence. Practice religious tolerance and live in harmony with people belong to other religion. Be vigilant and prudent in sharing the Gospel. Never compromise the Biblical principles with that of the world. Never withdraw from declaring that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life, and no one comes to the Father except through Jesus, John 14:6. Never give up until the last breath to live for Him. "And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to everyone according to his work. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last." Revelation 22:12-13.

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