

The Trouble With Christianity

Arrogance

April 24/25, 2010

Good morning everyone.

After the 9-11 terrorist attacks on the United States, he called Islam “a very evil and wicked religion.” In a later op-ed piece in *The Wall Street Journal*, he wrote that he did not believe *Muslims themselves* were evil because of their faith, but “as a minister I believe it is my responsibility to speak out against the terrible deeds that are committed as a result of Islamic teaching.”

More recently, he said,

“I am not on a crusade against Muslims. I love the Muslim people . . . I want them to know that they don't have to die in a car bomb; don't have to die in some kind of holy war to be accepted by God. But it's through faith in Jesus Christ and Christ alone.”

Well, I don't know if you heard the news, but because of these statements and others, the Pentagon last week decided to disinvite Christian evangelist Franklin Graham, son of the renowned Billy Graham, as its main speaker on the National Day of Prayer event on May 6. Col. Thomas Collins, spokesman for the U.S. Army, said Graham's remarks were “not appropriate. We're an all-inclusive military. We honor all faiths ... Our message to our service and civilian work force is about the need for diversity and appreciation of all faiths.”¹

Whether you agree or disagree with Graham's statements; whether you agree or disagree with the Pentagon's decision ... this is a great illustration of what we're going to talk about today in this third week of our series, *The Trouble With Christianity*. We've been looking at some of the reasons why those who aren't Christians *aren't* Christians and one of those reasons is ... arrogance.

- How can Christians seriously believe that *their* way is *THE* way – “through Christ alone” as Graham put it?
- What gives Christians the right to push their beliefs and opinions on everyone else, as Graham has done – and likely will do again? Shouldn't they just “keep it to themselves” and let others live their lives as they please (as the song said)?
- How can anyone even consider becoming part of a group with such an intolerant view of other people and their faith?

Good questions – and not just because of what people like Franklin Graham say, but also because of what the Bible itself has to say.

For instance, the Apostle John wrote:

This is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. 1 John 5:11-12 (NIV)

The Apostle Peter agreed:

There is salvation in no one else! God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be saved.
Acts 4:12 (NLT)

The Apostle Paul wrote:

There is only one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and humanity—the man Christ Jesus. He gave his life to purchase freedom for everyone. 1 Timothy 2:5 (NLT)

And years before John, Peter or Paul even thought about writing or preaching ...

Jesus himself had said:

“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.”
John 14:6 (NLT)

And this is just a sampling of some of the exclusive and seemingly intolerant positions put forth by the Christian faith.

The question is ... what’s a thinking person to do with those claims – what’s a thinking person to do with the people and the faith who promote those claims?

The easy answer – but not necessarily the best answer – is to just dismiss them out-of-hand as an ancient relic of a less-enlightened time; a way of thinking that is fortunately now being left behind and replaced by a more progressive view that, as Col. Collins put it, is “all-inclusive.”

The more difficult answer – but one that I believe is better in the long run (if I may be so arrogant as to say so) – is to tone down for just a bit the reactionary emotions that rise up whenever we hear these kinds of statements, and to examine the assumption that the claims of Christianity are somehow more arrogant than any other in our culture.

And that’s what I want to try to do in this message.

Actually, I want to try to do *two* things. I have two goals for this message.

First, whether you’re a believer or a skeptic, I want to ...

... create some confidence in you, that despite what the culture tells us, to believe in the exclusive claims of Christianity is no more arrogant of a choice than a choice to believe there is *more* than “one way” or, even, an atheistic choice to believe there’s “no way” at all because there is no God at all.

Second, and this is probably more for those who are believers ...

I want to ...

... encourage humility ... humility to remember that, if we do believe, we’re no better than anyone else because we

do believe.

Confidence

Ok, let's get into it, and let's start with confidence. And let's begin with the question of why it even matters that we have some level of confidence that the claims of Christianity are at least as tolerant as any other claims made by any other religion or non-religion in our world.

And, there are two answers to that question: First, if you're a Christian you need confidence because the Bible tells us to always be ready to give an answer about what we believe and why we believe it.

You must worship Christ as Lord of your life. And if someone asks about your Christian hope, always be ready to explain it. 1 Peter 3:15 (NLT)

But, in this culture, as we've seen and continue to see, for a Christian to explain what he or she believes and why is almost automatically perceived as being arrogant. And, eventually, if people tell you enough times "you're being arrogant!" at some point you start wondering if maybe they're right. Maybe you *are* being intolerant. Maybe the belief you so dearly cling to is part of the problem with this world and you should just let go of it in the interest of peace and harmony.

And there are a lot of Christians these days – especially young people, those under 30 – who have heard that message over and over from the media and, quite frankly, from our education system and who have made that decision to do just that. "I don't want to have anything to do with something that is so divisive," they say, and so they turn their backs and walk away from Christ and Christianity. So, I want to create some confidence today, hopefully, that *that* is just not necessary.

On the other side of the coin, for those who are skeptics, I think the reason *you* need confidence is that you hear the same message from the culture that Christians do, except that in your case, it comes across as a not-so-subtle warning to stay away. The message to you is "only the uneducated and unenlightened believe in and follow Christ. Only those who are close-minded and bigoted embrace Christianity. And, you don't *really* want to be part of *that*, do you? And, you don't *really* want to be one of *them*, do you?"

And of course you don't, because there's no question that a world full of uneducated, unenlightened, close-minded and bigoted people is not a good thing. And if that's what it takes to be a Christian, you should not join up! No one should.

But what if... what if the message from our culture is wrong? What if embracing Christ and Christianity really isn't any more destructive or counterproductive or arrogant than any other worldview option that you might choose to embrace? What if it actually has the power to improve the world, if it's truly understood and truly lived out?

Now, obviously, I can't convince you of that in the short amount of time we have together. I'll give you some thoughts as to why that might be true (why I think it *is* true) but, really, what I hope to do in this is *to give you a reason to doubt the reason you've been told you should doubt Christianity*. Or, to put it in more positive terms, I want to create some confidence in you concerning Christianity and its supposed arrogance and intolerance.

And, to do so, I'm going to again lean pretty heavily on Tim Keller and his book, *The Reason for God*, which, by the way, we finally have available in our resource center as well as the Kinnaman and Lyons book I've referred to, *UnChristian*. I think they're \$12 and \$14 each, so pick one up if you want to go even deeper on the issue.

Anyway, concerning the cultural labeling of exclusive religious claims as unenlightened and even outrageous, and the stigmatizing of those who believe such things, Keller writes that even though it is having some effect at discouraging people from becoming believers ...

“It cannot ultimately succeed, however, because at its heart is a fatal inconsistency, even perhaps a hypocrisy, that will lead to the collapse of this way of thinking.”

Wow, that's a pretty strong assertion to make! Why would he say such a thing? What's the inconsistency?

Well ... to see it, we need to first look at some of the axioms by which our culture evaluates “religion” – the unstated assumptions that have now achieved the status of “common sense” among us.

For instance (and I'm sure you've heard these) ...

- All major religions are basically the same (they teach the same things in different words though the concepts are the same), so all are equally valid.
- Religious beliefs are too culturally and historically conditioned to be considered “absolute truth” – true for everyone, everywhere at all times.
- Each religion only sees part of the truth. Everybody has a little piece of the truth, but nobody has the whole.
- It's arrogant to try to convert others (because you think you're “right”)

No surprise here, right? We've all heard and thought and even been taught these ideas.

Ok, now let's examine them one-by-one.

- First of all, is it true that all major religions basically teach the same thing and therefore, are equally valid in what they're saying?

Let's do a very quick survey of major doctrines.

Like the existence of a personal God, i.e. a God who is out there somewhere who is a person, who knows you and you can know and relate to ...

- Buddhists say “no” there is no such thing.
- Hindus say “sort of” – they believe that God is an abstract force that can occasionally take the form of a human or even an animal.
- The Bible says “yes” – God is a personal being who actually created human beings in His own image, and He

loves us and wants to have a relationship with us.

Can you see that those are clearly not the same?

Concerning *salvation* ... beyond the fact that major religions define that term very differently ...

- Buddhists say salvation (whatever it means) comes by self-effort alone – because there is no personal god out there to help or guide you.
- Hindus say it comes through devotion, good works and self-control.
- Muslims believe you earn your salvation by paying for your sins one way or another.
- Christians say the exact opposite of all of those: you can't earn salvation; you can't do it on your own, which is why you need Jesus of Nazareth, who is God in the flesh, who died for our sins. You receive salvation as a gift by believing in Him instead of yourself.

Again, clearly not the same set of beliefs.

And, speaking of Jesus ...

- Christians, as I just said, believe he was God in the flesh.
- Buddhists believe Jesus was a good teacher, but less important than Buddha.
- Muslims believe that Jesus was a prophet on the level of Adam, Noah or Abraham but, of course, less important than Muhammad.²

Not the same thing.

In fact, in his book, Keller describes an occasion when he had an opportunity to participate in an interfaith panel discussion in which all of the participants (representing each of these major world religions) were able to agree on just one statement concerning the person of Jesus:

And here's the statement that they came up with.

“If Christians are right about Jesus being God, then Muslims and Jews fail in a serious way to love God as God really is.

But, if Muslims and Jews are right then Jesus is not God but rather a teacher or prophet, then Christians fail in a serious way to love God as God is.”

That's the agreement between the major religions concerning Jesus. The bottom line, Keller wrote, was that “we couldn't all be equally right about the nature of God.”³

So, realistically, the most you can say about “all religions” is that they agree that there is more to this life than meets the eye. Something is “out there” or “in here” and we ought to discern it and try to respond to it in some way.

Therefore ... to collapse all of the various doctrines and say that all religions are equally valid because they're all kind of

saying the same thing but with different words ... is to be intellectually dense or dishonest ... unless, unless ... somehow you, above all others, have actually figured out how they all fit together. And to claim *that* -

1. To claim that somehow “all religions actually reconcile in their beliefs” – is to claim a level of personal enlightenment that *none of those religions* even claim for themselves.

Do you see that? If someone says this – that all religions actually reconcile in their beliefs - it means that they are holding a specific view of God and spiritual reality which they believe to be superior to the beliefs of most of the major religions and the people in the world.

I don't know ... that sounds kind of ... arrogant, doesn't it?

- Ok, what about the second axiom? That all religions are equally *false* because beliefs are culturally and historically conditioned and therefore can't be trusted to reveal absolute truth. Any religious belief – such as “Jesus is the only way” – is a product of a local culture, a local point in time, and can't be true for all people everywhere.

And, it sounds really impressive when you first hear it because it takes into account the overwhelming evidence that belief *does* appear to be socially-conditioned. However, there's a big problem with how we typically use that evidence: *we freely apply it to what religions teach us, but we don't apply it what our culture teaches us!*

I mean, why isn't our cultural belief that “because religious beliefs are historically and culturally conditioned they are therefore untrustworthy” *also* considered to be a culturally-conditioned belief and therefore untrustworthy? The argument can easily be made that people who believe that “culturally-conditioned beliefs are invalid” do so only because that's what their culture – our culture – has told them to believe ... and maybe they should not blindly trust that belief.

See that?

Now, what this means with respect to our discussion about views on religion is that there are two culturally-conditioned beliefs. One comes from a religious bias (Christian or otherwise). One comes from a non-religious bias.

2. And for the non-religious system to claim that “religious belief *must* be invalid because of cultural conditioning” is to claim that *its* culturally-conditioned understanding of truth is superior.

In other words, “our bias is better than yours.”

Really? That sounds arrogant and intolerant to me and I'm highly offended! Not.

But this is a huge blind spot in the case against Christianity – or any religious system, for that matter.

- Ok, what about the idea that each religion only sees part of the truth but no single one sees the whole thing? God revealed some of it to the Jews, some to the Buddhists, some to the Muslims, etc, etc.

Sometimes this is explained in terms of the “elephant analogy” which I’m sure you’ve heard.

Four blind men come across a large animal.

- One guy touches its side and says, “I think this creature is like a wall.”
- Another guy finds its leg and says, “No, I think it’s more like a tree.”
- The third guy touches its tail and says, “You’re both wrong – this animal is more like a rope.”
- And the fourth guy, who is holding the elephant’s trunk says, “All of you are wrong – this thing is more like a huge cane.”

Are any of them wrong? No. But none of them are totally right, either. Each of them has a different perspective on the same animal, but it’s *only part* of the animal.

“It’s similar with all these religions,” the axiom hold. “They each have a different perspective on God, just not the *total* perspective.”

And it sounds logical and sensible ... until you really think about it. But once you do, you’ll notice something that’s not obvious when you first hear the story.

And that is, that the person telling the story is the only one who can see!

He or she has the ability to see both the elephant and the guys examining it (who, by the way, just happen to be blind). And he or also she has the vantage point to know that each of them is aware of just one part of the elephant.

Now, logically, what this means is that whenever someone applies this analogy to religious belief, they are putting *themselves* in the position of the omniscient viewer. *They*, not the religions, have the superior vision and knowledge.

3. Therefore, to claim that “no religion can see the whole truth” is to claim that somehow you can.

Somehow, again, you are more enlightened than anyone else? Somehow, *your* belief that all the world religions are not seeing the whole picture trumps *theirs*? Sounds a little arrogant, doesn’t it? Why should we believe you over them?

And, by now, I hope you can see the common weakness in all of these arguments, the fatal inconsistency of which Keller was speaking:

Everyone holds exclusive and intolerant views of religious truth, not just Christians.

Even those who seem to be the most enlightened; even those who are the most faithful to the “axioms of religious tolerance,” which we just looked at, do this. Even those who claim no belief at all do this.

So, does that mean everyone is arrogant? Maybe. Maybe not. I think it’s just the nature of belief in something ... or even belief in nothing. That’s how it works – for all of us, Christian and non.

So, again, I say these things to you because I want you to have confidence that a choice to believe in Jesus and his claims and to become part of his movement is really no different than any other choice you could make on this issue. There is no rational reason to reject Christianity as being any more arrogant and intolerant than the system that calls it arrogant and intolerant ... which means that doubting the system might be a good idea.

Now, at this point someone might say, “OK, Rick, I get what you’re saying. When I think it through the logic is there. But, Christianity still has a huge problem in this area: *Christians who act in ways that are arrogant and intolerant.*”

And, THAT is a good point. As one skeptic put it:

It’s only natural that those who believe that they have a direct line to the Almighty would feel superior to others. This is so obvious that it needs little elaboration. A brief look at religious terminology confirms it. Christians have often called themselves “God’s people,” “the chosen people,” “the elect,” “the righteous,” etc., while nonbelievers have been labeled “heathens,” “infidels,” and “atheistic Communists.”

This sets up a two-tiered division of humanity, in which “God’s people” feel superior to those who are not “God’s people.” And, eventually, that two-tiered division almost always leads to an arrogance that winds up producing all kinds of conflict, including wars and terrorism.”⁴

And, I can understand why people would feel that way, why people would think that way. In fact, next week we’re going to look at how, even through history, some of this religious fundamentalism – even Christian fundamentalism – has caused some of these things.

And I can understand why people, who just want an end to all the conflict in this world, believe that “if we could just get rid of fundamentalist religion in all of its forms, life on this planet would be so much better.”

The problem is, however, that in the past century there were several massive efforts to do just that. Think of Soviet Russia, Communist China, the Khmer Rouge and even Nazi Germany. All of those regimes made it a stated goal to “get rid of religion.” *And they did.* But what was the result? It wasn’t more tolerance. It wasn’t more peace. It was more intolerance and more violence and more blood shed than ever before.

See the problem is not religion or even fundamentalism per se.

Keller writes that ...

“It’s common to say that fundamentalism leads to violence, yet as we have seen, all of us have fundamental, unprovable faith-commitments that we think are superior to those of others.”

The real question, he continues, is ...

“Which fundamentals will lead their adherents to be the most loving and receptive towards those with whom they differ? Which set of *unavoidably exclusive beliefs* [“unavoidably exclusive” because that’s just how belief in

anything or nothing works] – which set of *unavoidably exclusive beliefs* will lead us to humble, peace-loving behavior?”⁵

Great question. And this is where Christianity, friends, has a real answer because, at the very heart of the Christian view of reality is a man who loved, served, taught, welcomed, challenged, believed in and then died, not just for his friends, but *for his enemies*, praying for their forgiveness as he did. And as Christians truly reflect on this and fully embrace it, it can only lead to radically different ways of dealing with those who differ from us. *The most fundamental* of Christian beliefs actually has the power to be a force for peace and for great good in this world.⁶

Obviously, then, even if people don't want to accept Christianity themselves, it might be a good idea to encourage Christians, as I said in the first week of this series, to be *more* Christian and not *less*.

Humility

And that's what I want to do as we close out this message. I want to encourage those of us who are believers in Christ today to be more Christian, not less.

I want to take a few minutes to encourage humility in those of us who follow Jesus because, truth is, that while a lot of Christians feel intimidated in this culture to “give an answer for the hope that is in you” (as Peter wrote), some of us are just over the top on this issue. Some of us are so concerned for standing up for what's right and good and true that we come off as arrogant because, we are arrogant. We think we *are* better. And that makes people mad, and rightfully so.

Some will say, “Wait a minute, Rick. That's what Jesus said would happen. ‘The world rejects me, so it will reject you.’ How do you even avoid coming off as being arrogant when you have a leader – Jesus – who says he is the only way and that you're supposed to follow him and invite other people to follow him to? I mean, from the get-go, you're throwing down the gauntlet, aren't you?”

Not necessarily. I think you can still be humble in this. I think there are few things we can do that will make our Leader's claim much more palatable, even in this culture.

And by the way, I also think for those who are skeptics, this might help you understand how and why Christianity has the power to be a force for peace and goodness in this world.

1. First of all, those of us who are Christians, I think it would be helpful to show humility, by leading with grace and following with truth.

Let me explain what I mean by that ... leading with grace and following with truth. One of the things that Jesus was noted for, and the people who followed him picked up on it right away, is that Jesus had this ability to be perfectly balanced in grace and truth. And, grace is the ability to give people favor that they don't deserve, favor that they can't earn. You're accepting and loving of people before you go into saying, “here is what's wrong, and, here is what you need to fix.” And, Jesus had this ability, John wrote:

The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. John 1:17 (NIV)

He had this perfect balance. But, when you look at what he did in his life, so often you see that when he dealt with people, he led with grace and then he followed with truth.

- Think about the story with Jesus & the woman who was caught in adultery: The religious leaders, the Pharisees, dragged her out in front of Jesus and said, “Moses said we’re supposed to stone this woman. What do you say?” And, Jesus said, “whoever is without sin, you throw the first stone.” And, what does he say to the woman? Truth and grace, but he leads with grace, he says, “Where are your accusers? neither do I condemn you” (grace); “Now, go and sin no more.” He didn’t sugar coat what she was doing. It’s sin – quit it. Stop ruining your life with this. He led with grace and followed with truth.
- Another story of Jesus & Zacchaeus, the tax collector – We’ve talked about the status of tax collectors in the Hebrew culture many times. They were thought of as co-conspirators with the Romans. They were traitors and the way they made their money was basically how much money they could get out of you to pay taxes to the Romans. Some of them were really good at it and would strong arm people and they made a lot of money because they were basically robbing the people of Israel. And, one day Jesus was walking down the road, and there were a lot of people around him wanting to see what he was going to do next, what he was going to say next. And as he is walking down the road, and the Bible says there is a short guy sitting in this tree (so that he could see Jesus) and somehow Jesus knows the guy and he says, “Zacchaeus, I want you to come down out of that tree because I coming to your house for dinner today.” And the people were stunned because to have dinner with people in that culture meant that you were saying to them “I think you’re the kind of person that God really wants to invite to His great banquet at the end of time. And, I think God has a plan for your life and God cares about you.” And, to say that to a tax collector... you’ve got to be kidding! What was Jesus doing? He was leading with grace. Well, the story goes, he goes to Zacchaeus’ house and they have dinner and apparently some kind of conversation happens because at the end of the dinner Zacchaeus stands up and says, “Hey look, whatever I’ve done wrong, however I’ve cheated people out of money, I’m going to payback 10 fold.” What happened? Somewhere in there, there was some truth that was said. Jesus led with grace and followed with truth.

You know, the only people Jesus really ever yelled at (when you read scripture) were the religious people. He never yelled at unreligious people. He led with grace and then he followed with truth. Some of us need to bear that in mind. Some of us need to remember that, as we sang earlier in the service “It’s the kindness of God – not the anger of God – that leads people to repentance.” Jesus was the perfect example of that.

And, that’s why, especially in this culture, I think we need to lead with grace and then follow with truth, not the other way around.

Second thing that might be helpful to us is to ...

2. Remember that “*The Way*” is not “my way” (as if we somehow invented it or discovered it).

I like how one author put it:

Those who accuse Christians of being arrogant because we say “our God is better than yours” and “we are right and you are wrong” have a point. God is not *our* God (i.e., we didn’t invent God; we don’t have exclusive claim to God. We didn’t do something to make him love us.) And, we (technically) are not the ones who are right.⁷

Jesus is the one who is right. Not us.

See, the whole Christian experience isn’t our idea at all. It’s someone else’s.

The Bible is very clear concerning the truth about those who are believers in Jesus. Paul doesn’t mince any words, he says:

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins ... But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved.

Ephesians 2:1,4-5 (NIV)

You and I did nothing. We were nothing. We brought nothing to the table. We didn’t figure out a way to “get to God.” God figured out a way to get to us! The whole thing is God’s idea from beginning to end.

Sometimes what happens to us Christians is that we get so into “our” faith that we forget that. It’s not our faith. It’s His; it’s His idea. He’s not “our” God. We get so comfortable with “our” God. No, wait a minute – we’re his people, but we didn’t invent him. We don’t own him. We have no claim over him.

That’s why the old saying is true: “Evangelism (telling other people about Jesus) is just one beggar telling another beggar where to find food.” It’s not like we’ve figured out this thing and now we’re throwing the banquet and we’re going to invite all the needy guests. No, the deal is, we’re the needy guests and we just happen to be first in line and God said, “You can come to my banquet, and now I’m going to commission you to go tell other people that they can come as well before the meal is served.

Third thing, and we’ll close with this,

3. Even though you *are* right, it’s not about being right. (Just like Christianity has rules, but it’s not about the rules). **It’s about loving God and loving people.**

And, let me be really clear about this – I think the Christian truth/teaching, the Gospel of Jesus, is right. I think when you compare it to all the other ways of looking at reality in this world, it makes the most sense. Not that I don’t ever have questions, or things I don’t understand or even moments of doubt, but I think when you line them all up and ask what explains where we are, how we got here, why we have a problem, what the solution is, there is no better answer than the answer that is proposed by that of Christianity. And, I think this is right, and I hope you do too. But, even though you are right, it’s not about being right. It’s about loving God and loving people.

And when you read the letters of the New Testament, this issue came up again and again. And we talked about it last week – they were trying to decide if it was okay to eat a certain kind of meat. We looked at that in Romans, and they had that same problem in Corinth. Paul wrote them a letter too and he helped them try to work through this ...

While knowledge makes us feel important, it is love that strengthens the church (people). Anyone who claims to know all the answers doesn't really know very much. 1 Corinthians 8:1-3 (NLT)

Other translations actually say: “Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.” (NIV/KJV)
It’s not about being right, it’s about loving.

Conclusion

These days, if you look around, it seems like the whole world is shouting “my way, my way” and putting down anyone who disagrees. There’s very little love and compassion for people who see things differently than we do. But, friends, that is *not* the way of Jesus because Jesus was full, not only of truth, but also grace. He led with grace and followed with truth. Jesus had confidence that he was right, but he also knew that it wasn’t just about being right and winning an argument. It’s about loving people.

Years ago, a movie came out which illustrated what happens when Christians are more interested in being “right” above all else. It was the story of a small town that became divided when one of the high school students, Ren McCormack, proposed something that had never before happened there: a dance.

If you’ve seen the movie – *Footloose* – you probably remember that the pastor of the local church, Reverend Moore, takes a stand against it. And he’s convinced that not only is he right, it is his job to single-handedly convince everyone that he is right. Near the end of the movie, as he is practicing his latest sermon against Ren McCormack’s proposal, his daughter comes in to the church sanctuary.

Watch what happens:

“Don’t you talk like that in here!”

That one line says it all, doesn’t it? The news that she’s no longer a virgin isn’t greeted with sadness over what she’s done, or even anger at her. In fact, his response is not about *her* at all. It’s about what’s right – so much so that he can’t even see his own daughter’s heart.

Now, I realize this is just a movie (kind of a goofy movie), but it raises a really good question for those of us who are followers of Jesus: *would the people around us say that we’re like Reverend Moore – more interested in what’s right and in being right than we are in them?* There’s a fine line between truth and grace and it’s easy to fall into the ditch on one side of it or the other.

But let’s not forget that where Christianity has grown and expanded throughout history, it hasn’t been because of power moves or because Christians “took a stand” about what was right. Christianity has exploded whenever believers have said, “Make no mistake about it: Jesus of Nazareth is Lord above any power or authority on earth. But, for some reason, he has chosen to love people as messed up as we are, so we’re going to love you the way he has loved us.” And then they did.

They knew the truth; they believed the truth and they proclaimed the truth with confidence, without apology; *but they*

humbly backed it up with the love they themselves had received and that's what made the difference. That's why it grew.

My prayer is - may that be true of us; may it be true of you, may it be true of me and may it be true of this body of believers called North Heartland Community Church.

Amen.

ENDNOTES

¹ From the Washington Post, <http://tinyurl.com/23wq6cf>

² http://www.wnd.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE_ID=50293

³ Keller pg 4.

⁴ Twenty Reasons to Abandon Christianity,
<http://www.seesharppress.com/20reasons.html#numberfive>

⁵ Keller, pg 20

⁶ Yet another brilliant Keller insight, pg 20.

⁷ See http://ecuwollongong.org/reading/2004/how_not_to_be_an_arrogant_christian.php