

Reversing Negative Christian Stereotypes

Bible Study



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Judgmental

Negative Stereotype: Non-Christians believe we are judgmental. (Condemnation)

Treating non-believers as "sinners"/or "more" sinful than us, acting morally superior. Criticizing other's beliefs, choices, or conduct, when they don't reflect our beliefs, choices, or conduct.

Making decisions ABOUT someone without really knowing or caring to know about them.

- What's your definition of being judgmental?

A Story to Make It Real: *From "alistarz" on thinkatheist.com*

"My grandmother always tried to make me feel bad that my mom didn't take my brothers and I to church. She would tell me that my mom was a bad person. Fortunately I was only around my grandmother for a few weeks each summer and on Thanksgiving or Christmas. My mom however was raised constantly being told that she was a bad person whenever she did something 'ungodly.' I've seen the emotional scars it left on my mother."

Examples: (Do you have any stories to share here? What's the impact of our judgment?)

1. How we treat or talk about divorced couples.
2. How we treat or talk about a woman who has an abortion.
3. How we look at and talk about people who have lots of tattoos, or piercings in "not-so-typical" places.
4. Disowning friends or family for choosing a different religion, choosing not to be religious at all, or choosing to be atheist.
5. How we treat/talk about an unmarried couple living together or who is having a child.
6. How we treat a referee/umpire that presumably makes a "bad call".
7. How we talk about the "unacceptable" people others spend time with. (Acts 11:1-3)
8. Any other examples you can think of?

What God Say About It (The Bible): God speaks to us about Judgment on two fronts:

- 1) Judgment of people outside the church, 2) Judgment of people within the church

- **John 8:7, 11 (NIV)**

⁷ **If any one of you is without sin**, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.

- **1 Samuel 16:7 (NIV)**

⁷ But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height (the future King David's taller and more handsome brothers), for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."

- **John 3:17-18 (NIV)**

¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

- **1 Corinthians 4:4-5 (NIV)**

⁴ My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. ⁵ Therefore **judge nothing before the appointed time**; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God.

- **Psalms 50:4-6 (NIV)**

⁴ He summons the heavens above, and the earth, that he may judge his people: ⁵ "Gather to me my consecrated ones, who made a covenant with me by sacrifice." ⁶ And the heavens proclaim his righteousness, for **God himself is judge.**

- **Matthew 7:1-5 (NIV)**

¹ Do not judge, or you too will be judged. ² For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. ³ Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in **your brother's eye** and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? ⁴ How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? ⁵ You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

- **Romans 2:1-3 (NIV)**

¹ You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. ² Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. ³ So when you, a mere man, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment?

- **1 Corinthians 5:9-13 (NIV)**

⁹ I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people--
¹⁰ **not at all meaning the people of this world** who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. ¹¹ But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone **who calls himself a brother** but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat. ¹² **What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside?** ¹³ **God will judge those outside.** "Expel the wicked man from among you."

- **Verses for further study:** Psalms 75:7, Isaiah 3:13-14, John 5:22, 1 Corinthians 5:1-3, 1 Corinthians 11:31-32, Acts 11:1-3, Matthew 13:36-43, Matthew 13:47-50, Romans 2:12-16, Romans 14:10-13

Closing Thoughts on Judgment: (imagine visiting a judge for a speeding ticket)

To judge rightly, you need the **authority** to pass down judgment, the **power to enforce** your judgment, a comprehensive **understanding** of the rules, laws, or guidelines that determine right from wrong, the **discernment** to identify the truth from all perspectives, and the **wisdom** to exercise mercy and forgiveness or wrath and punishment at the appropriate time, for the greatest good.

- **Who alone can rightly judge?**
- **Can you give up judging others and trust that God will judge rightly?**

Action:

- 1) In the coming weeks, raise your awareness of how you might unintentionally be judgmental through your thoughts and words, and take notice of similar judgment from others.
- 2) Study these Bible verses for greater depth and meaning.
- 3) When tempted to judge someone, pray and trust God to judge for you according to His perfect will. Then for bonus points ☺, go out of your way to show love to them instead.

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Anti-Homosexual

Negative Stereotype: Non-Christians believe we are Anti-Homosexual.

Treating gays, lesbians, bi-sexuals, cross-dressers, transvestites, and transgendered peoples as immoral and some of the worst "sinners" among us (i.e. especially worse than us). We treat them as wicked or "filthy". We suggest that Aids-HIV is God's punishment of their sexual sin.

- What's your definition of being anti-homosexual?

A Story to Make It Real:

From "artsyatheist" on thinkatheist.com

"The truth is that evangelical Christians believe that being gay is a "choice" and a "sin" is homophobic, and perpetuates a culture that wrongly discriminates and marginalizes."

From "George K." on thinkatheist.com

"I enjoy cross dressing, it makes me feel good about my appearance. It is my right, however the value of that right is severally damaged when I am constantly under question, and attack by members of various religious groups. I know better than to treat people (religious or otherwise) in such a crass and heartless manor. However many religious people, from my experience, do not know better. Are you personally familiar with what it feels like to have people follow you around shouting rude things, throwing empty coffee cups at you, or cornering you with the intention of goading you into a fight? I just want to live my life, my way."

Examples: (Do you have any stories to share? What's the impact of our anti-homosexuality?)

1. We are viewed as anti-homosexual when we are seen protesting gay marriage.
2. We are viewed as anti-homosexual when we oppose adoption by gay parents.
3. "No one goes out and tries to force Christian men to be gay, but many Christians take no issue with going out and trying to forcing gay men to be strait."
4. "You apply your morals to me... to limit MY freedom."

Discussion:

- People often say that hate stems from fear or not understanding something. What fears or misunderstandings might we have about homosexuality or befriending homosexuals?
- Are homosexuals born that way or is it a choice/lifestyle? What's your experience/thoughts?
- How should we respond when a homosexual wants to befriend our same sex children?
- Where should we draw the line in influencing our culture/another person with our morals?

What God Say About It (The Bible): God speaks to us about homosexuality and sin. In the Old Testament when Jews were under the Mosaic Law, some sins were punished by death and others were allowed to be forgiven by a ritual sacrifice or cleansing. In the New Testament, sexual immorality is discussed as a sin, but for believers, Jesus cleanses us of ALL sins (big and small).

Old Testament

- **Leviticus 20:13 (NIV)**
¹³ "If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They must be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads.
- **Deuteronomy 22:5 (NIV)**
⁵ A woman must not wear men's clothing, nor a man wear women's clothing, for the LORD your God detests anyone who does this.

New Testament

- **1 Corinthians 6:9-10 (NIV)**
⁹ Do you not know that the **wicked** will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the **sexually immoral** nor **idolaters** nor **adulterers** nor male prostitutes nor **homosexual offenders** ¹⁰ nor **thieves** nor the **greedy** nor **drunkards** nor **slanderers** nor **swindlers** will inherit the kingdom of God.
- **1 Corinthians 6:18-20 (NIV)**
¹⁸ Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body...²⁰ ...Therefore honor God with your body.
- **James 2:10 (NIV)**
¹⁰ For whoever keeps the whole law yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.
- **James 2:13 (NIV)**
¹³ because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!
- **Verses for further study:** Rom 13:9-10, Gal 5:16-17, Gal 5:19-21, John 8:7,11, James 1:20

Discussion:

- Who has a sinful nature (all or just homosexuals?). Are we truly any "better"?
- How does God view one (or any) sin compared to another? (Examples: heterosexual lust, adultery (even just with eyes- better to poke out your eye than go to hell), divorce (let no one separate what God has joined), idolatry of money (cant server two masters), being IN the world and OF the world.) Do we hate "other" people's sin more than our own?
- We are taught: "love the sinner but hate the sin". How can we teach the truth, sincerely and lovingly, without coming across as intolerant, judgmental, and homophobic?
- Jesus came to save not just the righteous, but sinners. Jesus can save even homosexuals and Jesus loves them just as much as he loves us. Do you believe this? Why/Why Not?

Closing Thoughts on Homosexuality:

How would Jesus treat a homosexual? Similar to how he treated other "sinners" such as prostitutes. He would not condemn them, but love them. And if they accepted Him as their savior, he would forgive them and tell them to go, and sin no more.

Action:

- 1) In the coming weeks, raise your awareness of how you think and act around homosexuals. Examine your heart and ask God how to respond.
- 2) Study the Bible verses for greater depth and meaning.
- 3) How can you show love to a homosexual friend, family member, co-worker, or acquaintance?

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Hypocritical

Negative Stereotype: Non-Christians believe we are hypocritical.

By hypocritical, they mean saying we believe something, but acting contrary to that belief; having a double standard. Or pretending to be better or more "holy" than someone else while privately being the same as other people. We talk about having "joy" and "peace" in our lives, while in many cases our lives are just as messed up, stressful, and full of uneasiness as everyone else. We have no problem passing righteous judgment on someone else, while ignoring our own problems. What's your definition of being hypocritical?

A Story to Make It Real: *From "anonymous" on thinkatheist.com*

"I do agree that Christians can be good people. But, not good enough to defy their god by doing some community outreach with "hell-bound" people. I would never consider being a Christian, but I might consider not being so critical if more Christians were open and genuine and willing to actually talk about their beliefs. Their arrogance ("we know the truth, you don't") belies the hypocrisy of whatever *acceptance/love* they could muster."

Examples: (Do you have any stories to share here? What's the impact of our hypocrisy?)

1. The way we lecture "non-believers" on sinning without developing any relationship.
2. How we act perfect on Sundays after being lewd or drunk on Saturday.
3. How we wear a cross around our neck, while cursing out a store clerk.
4. Claiming that loving others is part of being a Christian, but we verbally assault a friend or family member on a social media website.
5. How we justify our own sins, "I'm not as bad as other people who..."
6. How we pray loudly in church, or offer to serve and then complain about the person we're praying about or the service we have to do.
7. Driving a car with a Christian emblem on the back of our car, but driving disrespectfully or against the law.
8. Segregating ourselves with only certain friends, while gossiping about those around us.
9. Any other examples you can think of?

What God Say About It (The Bible): Jesus spoke about and warned against Hypocrisy:

- **Matthew 23:13 (NIV)**
Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.

- **Matthew 23:26-27 (NIV)**

Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean. "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean.

- **1 Peter 2:1 (NIV)**

Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind.

- **Matthew 15:7-9 (NIV)**

You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you:

" 'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.

They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men. ^(Isaiah 29:13)

- **Matthew 24:51 (NIV)**

He will cut him to pieces and assign him **a place with the hypocrites**, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

- **Verses for further study:** James 3:10-12, Luke 12:1, 1 Thessalonians 5:22, Matthew 7:3-5, John 8:7-11, Luke 13:15, Matthew 23:24, Job 20:5, Hebrews 6:1,

- **Closing Thoughts on Hypocrisy:**

Every Christian is guilty of living a sinful life because no **one is capable of escaping sin** on our own. When we speak or live in a way that hides our sins, or we act as if we do not struggle with any sins, we start down a road of hypocrisy. We begin to live as if we are above those who do not go to church. We live as if our sins are paid for, and not as bad as other people's sins, like we have a license to sin, because we know Jesus.

But this is exactly what the Bible scriptures speak about guarding against. We need to **confess our own sins to one another**, and look at each other as equally burdened with the same effects of sin. We need to stop living as if we are perfect or "special" compared to others who may not yet know Christ. And when we live in a way that demonstrates that we are all equal in our plight, we can then begin to see the value of **Christ as a savior to us all**.

- **Are you more concerned with pleasing man or pleasing God?**
- **Can you admit your own sins, and be willing to follow what you believe?**

Action:

- 1) In the coming weeks, evaluate your behavior outside of the church. Do your beliefs and actions match?
- 2) Study these Bible verses for greater depth and meaning.
- 3) When you represent Christ to others, be honest about your own shortcomings and admit your own failures and the redemption that Christ offers.

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Too Political

Negative Stereotype: Non-Christians believe we are Too Political.

This essentially means they believe we use politics or the legal system to force our beliefs on them. We make their immoral or undesired behaviors illegal, instead of just allowing them to live their lives their own way. This is NOT merely a belief in post-modernism (your truth is your truth, my truth is my truth, truth is relative). This is NOT merely a separation of church and state mentality either. Although when non-Christians hear the phrase "This is a Christian nation", their negative reaction is partly that of feeling minimized or disenfranchised and partly a fear that we are trying to create a theocracy (e.g. a government controlled by a particular religion...namely Christianity). In their mind, they believe we are attempting to control them through politics.

- What's your definition of being too-political?

A Story to Make It Real:

From "anonymous" on thinkatheist.com

"No one goes out and tries to force Christian men to be gay, but many Christians take no issue with going out and trying to force gay men to be strait."

"I am slowing growing more anti-Christian as the political religious right is pushing their agenda and therefore imposing their beliefs onto me."

"School boards across the country (most notably in Texas of late) are working to change the curriculum to promote an exclusively Christian viewpoint. From gutting science courses to rewriting history texts to mandating abstinence-only sex education to introducing Bible study courses."

"If one was a faithful Christian in their personal life but was able to respect the freedoms of others, what objection could truly be lodged against them? No one cares what you believe, only how your beliefs affect the personal lives of others."

"I can give two examples... 1) My brother keeps trying to impose his beliefs on my family, even when we have told him not to. 2) A local school board attempted to include the bible into school curriculum as required reading."

"Examples: how Christians politicize same sex marriage, sodomy, stores closed on Sunday, no mail on Sunday)"

Examples: (Do you have any stories to share? What's the impact of being too political?)

1. We are viewed as too political when we oppose same sex marriages.
2. We are viewed as too political when we oppose a women's right to choose abortion.
3. We are viewed as too political when we fight for prayer in school.
4. We are viewed as too political when "right wing" politicians talk about "family values" when they feel we're really saying "our family values...not your family values".

Discussion:

- Where should we draw the line in influencing our culture (other people) with our morals through politics?
- How would you feel if we were in the minority and other people were making our beliefs and values illegal? (Such as in China, Saudi Arabia, etc.)
- How can we engage in politics to reinforce and sustain our values and beliefs without taking rights and freedoms away from people with different values and beliefs?
- What should we do when another person's "rights" come in conflict with universal "self evident" truths, such as right to life (abortion).
- Pick an issue and answer, "how can we address this issue positively within our churches, communities, or state/federal government?" Death penalty, legalization of marijuana/other drugs, prostitution, topless clubs, and sodomy laws.
- If we disengaged from the political arena, would we eventually be at risk of having OUR rights and freedoms restricted? What fears do we have?

What God Say About It (The Bible):

- **Matthew 22:17, 21 (NASB)**
¹⁷ "Tell us then, what do You think? Is it lawful to give a poll-tax to Caesar, or not?"
²¹ ... "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's."
- **Romans 13:1-2, 5-7 (NASB)**
¹ Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. ² Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. ⁵ Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake. ⁶ For because of this you also pay taxes, for *rulers* are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. ⁷ Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax *is due*; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.
- **Daniel 1-5.** Story of Daniel's involvement as counselor to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon.
- **Esther** married King Ahasuerus of Persia. When the king's prime minister Haman influenced the king to kill all the Jews in their country, Esther used her marital and political influence to convince the King to save the Jews from genocide and allow them to defend themselves.

Closing Thoughts on Christian involvement in politics:

Jesus Christ lived in a time of Roman control of Jerusalem. He was more interested in how Church leaders were using His people and soiling the holiness of the Jewish temple. He was not standing in opposition to the Roman government as many Jews wanted. What can we learn from the example of Jesus Christ as it relates to our political climate and culture?

Action:

- As you engage in political conversations or activities, be mindful of other people's rights and freedoms. Consider how non-Christians may perceive your political passions and activities.

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Superficial Faith

Negative Stereotype: Non-Christians believe we have a Superficial or Blind Faith.

This essentially means they believe we don't know what we believe (or don't really believe what we believe because of our actions) and are uncomfortable and unprepared to discuss our beliefs with others who might disagree. They believe our beliefs are "skin deep", and don't go much beyond the Sunday school stories of "Jonah and the whale" or "Daniel and the lion's den". They dispute the Bible's truth; claiming it is full of myth, inaccuracies, and contradictions.

- What's your definition of having a superficial faith?

A Story to Make It Real: (From several sources on thinkatheist.com)

- *"Bible 'study' is an exercise in affirming/reinforcing their beliefs, instead of critical inquiry."*
- *"Blind faith: willful ignorance, maintaining ignorance even when presented with the evidence."*

Examples: (Do you have any stories to share? What's the impact of having a superficial faith?)

1. We have faith, but we don't live as if we truly believe. E.g. it's fake and superficial.
Read Titus 1:16, James 2:14-24
2. Atheist Penn Jillette (Penn & Teller comedy duo) challenges Christians saying "If you really believe God exists and I'm going to hell, then you SHOULD come talk to me. I admire those that do. If you really believe and DON'T talk to me, then you must really hate me!"

Discussion:

- If we are unwilling to talk to other people about God, what does this say about our faith or what does it say about our love for other people? **Read Philemon 1:6**
- People are rarely "reasoned" into believing. However, I DO believe having a confident and reasoned defense can propel someone into a self-discovery of God through the Holy Spirit. How well could you defend the Bible or God, which is the object of our faith?
- Jesus says that if we truly love Him, we will obey His commands (**John 14:15**). How would you respond if you were challenged about selectively picking and choosing which commands from the Bible to obey, or picking and choosing which practices to follow or ignore?
Read Exodus 20:9-10, Exodus 21:17, Matthew 15:3-9, Galatians 3:25
- Is it appropriate to continue with a Child-Like understanding after accepting Christ with a Child-Like faith? **Read Mark 10:15**

What God Say About It (The Bible):

- **1 Peter 3:15** "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect."
- **2 Timothy 3:14-17** "But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

- **Jude 1:3** "Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints."
- **1 Corinthians 3:1-4** "Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly--mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men?"
- **Hebrews 5:12-14** "In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil."
- **Hebrews 4:2** "For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith."

Closing Thoughts on Christian superficial faith: (Being Prepared With An Answer)

- Essential vs non-essential beliefs: review the early church statements of belief (creeds)
 - Nicene Creed, Confession of Chalcedon, Athanasian Creed, Apostles Creed, Westminster Confession and Westminster Catechisms
 - Creeds focus on doctrine of the Trinity (God the father, Son of God-Jesus, Holy Spirit), Jesus being eternal with God, not made or a creation of God, Jesus taking on flesh and becoming human, suffering, dying, and resurrecting after 3 days.
- Understand the history of the church and its splits over theological differences (Eastern Orthodox/Western Orthodox, Protestant Reformation). Some denominations place more emphasis on the Bible, while some emphasizes prophesy or tradition. Is there a perfect denomination or does it really matter, assuming they agree on the essentials?
- Accuracy of the Bible, compilation "canonization" process, and how books were included/excluded over time, rejection of Gnostic gospels, and the translation process
- Defense of the Resurrected Christ – Lee Strobel's "Case for Christ" focuses on this
- Understand why man needs salvation (original sin, nature of man), that salvation is available for everyone, and how Jesus' sacrifice made salvation possible (substitution).
- Understanding the transformed life: before and after acceptance of Jesus Christ

Action:

- Is action more important than understanding? You don't have to become a Bible scholar, theologian, or apologist, but you should understand the essential beliefs, decide whether you believe them, praise and worship God according to those beliefs, and be able to offer a reasonable explanation as to why you believe them to be true.

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Intolerant

Negative Stereotype: Non-Christians believe we are Intolerant.

Webster's Dictionary defines intolerance as: "Unwilling to grant equal freedom of religious expression. Unwilling to grant or share social, political, or professional rights." This can translate into: forcing our beliefs on others, setting up laws/systems based on our beliefs that must be followed by those with different beliefs, silencing opposing views, treating others as less-than (not respecting others), disowning friends/family with different beliefs, workforce discrimination based on religious beliefs, condemning or being insensitive to others with different beliefs.

Read more here: <http://www.changingthefaceofchristianity.com/intolerance/religious-intolerance-is/>

- What's your definition of being intolerant?

A Few Stories to Make It Real:

David Schumacher: "My sister posted on Facebook that 'this is one nation **under god** and if we didn't believe that, we atheists should get out of their Christian country'".

Thomas Stacey-Holmes: "I know that when I was Christian I struggled with condemning all the other folks that believed in other gods."

Rob: "Basically, a Christian will argue that 'since I believe so and so, everybody should follow these rules.'"

Anonymous: "During a friend's first day teaching at her new public school, the Principal decided to lead the teachers in an open prayer. Most of the staff is Christian, but my friend is agnostic. She was afraid of objecting to the prayer. Her job was hard to find, and she didn't want to put a target on herself. But none of her fellow Christian teachers seemed to mind in the least. However, had the Principal led the school in an Islamic prayer, my friend would have been equally as uncomfortable with the prayer, and your Christian teachers would have had a fit."

Dale Headley: "In 6 US states, atheists are prohibited from holding public office." (*Although the 1st & 14th amendments of the US Constitution invalidate and make such religious tests unconstitutional*). And the Civil Rights Act of 1964 made discrimination against someone because of their religious view illegal.

CFC Note: *Although these laws are still on the books, and not constitutionally enforceable, they do provide a historical example of how Christians have tried to set up laws/systems to acquire rights and benefits, and deny those rights and benefits from those that don't share our beliefs.* Read More: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/No_Religious_Test_Clause

Gay marriage is another example. Heterosexual Christians can legally marry. But homosexuals are denied this right based on OUR beliefs.

Zachary Moore: "Take blue laws, for example. Car dealerships have to be closed on Sunday in most places. Alcohol can't be bought before noon on Sunday, and liquor stores are closed on Sunday. Some places prohibit hunting on Sunday." Read More: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blue_law

Zachary Moore (Cont): "My brother teaches at a public school that sends students to the Catholic Church for religious education during the school day. Non-believers in these areas are so overwhelmingly outnumbered that they say nothing and stay in the closet. Or if they do speak up, they're cast out like Damon Fowler in Bastrop, Louisiana."

Examples: (Do you have any stories to share here? What's the impact of our intolerance?)

1. Only allowing a Christian prayer before a public (secular) school football game, even though the players and fans are made up of different belief systems.
2. Demanding that Judeo/Christian creationism be taught in schools, but excluding other beliefs or scientific theories from also being taught or discussed. Note: this type of intolerance works both ways, such as when schools don't allow the mention or discussion of non-evolutionary theories to the origin of human life.
3. Pushing to have the Bible taught in school, yet opposing the inclusion of other religious texts from discussion.
4. Refusing to discuss or even admit opposing views exist.
5. Refusing the idea that other people have any valid points on a subject we disagree with; suggesting that there is NO truth or redeeming quality of any opposing belief.
6. Discouraging challenging questions from being asked about our beliefs/church doctrine.
7. Suggesting that there is only ONE correct human interpretation of scripture (I have it and you don't); even though the multitude of Christian denominations is a direct result of different biblical interpretations and practices.
8. Saying (or thinking) "I'm right! You are wrong!" without taking the time to even consider and evaluate another person's views or beliefs.
9. Not tolerating the PERSON who holds an opposing belief.
(Thinking they are obviously not as bright as you, because they don't agree with you).
10. Any other examples you can think of?

What God Say About It (The Bible):

The following verses can provide guidance on how to relate with others, including those with whom we have ideological disagreements.

On treating others as "less than", not respecting others:

- **Mark 12:31** "Love your neighbor as yourself."
- **Matthew 7:12** "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets."
- **Luke 6:27-31 (also see: Matthew 5:43-48)**
²⁷"But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. ²⁹ If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. ³⁰ Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. ³¹ Do to others as you would have them do to you.

On seeking peace and harmony:

- **1 Peter 3:8-11 (NIV)**
⁸ Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. ⁹ Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. ¹⁰ For, "Whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech. ¹¹ He must turn from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it.

On disowning friends/family with different beliefs:

- **2 Corinthians 6:14** “Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?”

This is not to mean we need to completely separate ourselves from non-believers. But we should not join together with non-believers in ungodly actions. E.g. we should not join them in idol worship, dishonest business schemes, unrighteous activities that would lead to more sin. We should not join them in THEIR ways, but we should feel free to join them in activities that are pleasing to God. Should we not marry an unbeliever? There is no such prohibition (1 Corinthians 7:12-14). However, we should be cautious that we don't marry an unbeliever and become more like them and join them in their ungodly ways.

- **Acts 10:28-29 (NIV)**

²⁸ He said to them: "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean. ²⁹ So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection."

- **Jude 1:22-23 (NIV)**

²² Be merciful to those who doubt; ²³ snatch others from the fire and save them; to others show mercy, mixed with fear--hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.

Verses for further study: 1 Timothy 5:1-2, Romans 2:1-4, 1 Timothy 5:8, Ephesians 4:2-3, Romans 14:1-4, John 4:9, Matthew 9:10-13

Closing Thoughts on Intolerance:

Hold to the truth. And keep in mind that we don't have to agree with others, or deny our own beliefs, to be more tolerant. Strive to be more loving and respectful while maintaining the Biblical truth we seek to preserve.

2 Timothy 1:13-14 (NIV) *“What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you--guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.”*

Action:

- 1) In the coming weeks, raise your awareness of how you might unintentionally be intolerant through your thoughts and words, and take notice of similar intolerance from others.
- 2) Study these Bible verses for greater depth and meaning.
- 3) Seek to be more loving, graceful, compassionate, merciful, and understanding of those people who disagree with our Christian beliefs.

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