
BIBLE TALK

This week the question is: ***What does the Bible teach about "tolerance"?***

Are you aware of what people mean by the word "tolerance" today? The word has been recently redefined and it carries a lot of emotional firepower. It has become a potent weapon in our current culture wars.

Webster's New World Dictionary defines "tolerate" as: "to recognize and respect [others' beliefs, practices, etc.] without sharing them," and "to bear or put up with [someone or something not especially liked]." Although the word "tolerant" is not found in the NT, 1 Cor 13:7 comes close. There the scriptures say, "[love] endures all things." The word tolerance derives from the Latin *tolerare*, meaning to endure.

During my college days I had class mates and co-workers whose lifestyles were clearly ungodly. I did not endorse their sinful activities and I did not participate in them. I did my best to get along with all my classmates and coworkers, treating them with courtesy. Paul says in Rom 12:18, "If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men." Again, he says in Gal 6:10, "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith."

Based on the traditional meaning of the word, I was exercising tolerance toward these people. *Traditional tolerance* respects and accepts the individual without necessarily approving of his beliefs or behavior. *Traditional tolerance* distinguishes between what people think and do and the people themselves. In other words, tolerance means we hate the sin, but love the sinner. We view the sinner as a soul created in the image of God (Gen 2:7), and that soul is worth more than all the world Jesus said (Mt 16:26). This is why Jesus died on the cross – to try to save those who would obey Him (Heb 5:9).

But there is a new definition of tolerance that is being advocated in our schools and the media that is vastly different to the traditional definition. The new definition of tolerance says that if you don't approve of and endorse a person's belief and lifestyle, you don't love the person. To accept and respect someone, therefore you must **approve of** and **endorse** that person's values, and lifestyle. And when you don't, you are considered insensitive, intolerant, and bigoted.

Josh McDowell says, "I would estimate that 80 percent of the time when you hear the word *tolerance* used outside the walls of the church today – by schoolteachers, news anchors, government officials, activists, celebrities, perhaps even your own children – it almost never refers to traditional tolerance but to what we are calling the *new tolerance*" (The New Tolerance 18).

This new definition is based on the assumption that there is no such thing as moral absolutes. A high school sociology textbook discussing homosexual practices says, "Everything is right somewhere and nothing is right everywhere." The authors of this text are drawing the

unwarranted conclusion that there is no definite right or wrong. Truth is merely an opinion and goodness is only what the majority says it is.

Thomas A. Hembock, national fraternity executive, explains: *“The definition of new ... tolerance is that every individual’s beliefs, values, lifestyle, and perception-of-truth claims are equal ... There is no hierarchy of truth. Your beliefs and my beliefs are equal, and all truth is relative.”*

This relativism is the spirit of our society. It’s no surprise that *intolerance* is viewed as our society’s greatest sin. The intolerant person is the one thing that cannot be tolerated, the one person who must be shamed or silenced.

Dr. Fredrick W. Hill, a school administrator says, *“It is the mission of public schools not to tolerate intolerances.”*

Philosophy professor Leslie Armour adds, *“Our idea is that to be a virtuous citizen is to be one who tolerates everything except intolerance.”*

According to the above definition, anyone who believes dogmatically in anything – and especially in absolute truth – is guilty of intolerance! You don’t even have to say anything. If you even think that some beliefs and behaviors are right and others are wrong, for all people, for all places, and for all times, then you are intolerant.

Proponents of the new tolerance have no problem being intolerant toward Christians. The Bible makes it clear that all values, beliefs, lifestyles, and truth-claims are not equal. The Bible teaches that the God of the Bible is the only true God (Jer 10:10), that all His words are (absolutely) true (Ps 119:160), and that if something is not right in God’s sight, it is wrong (Dt 6:18).

Naturally, these teachings offend the proponents of new tolerance. Consequently, Christians are viewed as the greatest sinners in our culture. They are committing the only serious sin left in the world – the sin of intolerance. Sometimes even murder has extenuating circumstances, but not the sin of intolerance. America is sick of intolerant people and it’s not going to tolerate them anymore!

One tactic of the new tolerance is to label anyone who disagrees as being “phobic.”

Debra J. Sanders, writing in *The San Francisco Chronicle*, reported the reaction of the “old-fashioned” father who protested the content of the sex education his son was receiving in public school. “When I complained that my elementary school son was too young to understand homosexuality,” the father said, “they called me a ‘homophobe.’ [They] wouldn’t listen, they just called me names.”

This tactic of name-calling has been very effective for the advocates of the new tolerance.

In addition to name-calling, advocates of the new tolerance are not above quoting scripture in order to silence the judgmental Christians. Their favorite passage is in the eighth

chapter of John. When an adulterous woman was brought to Jesus, He said, *“He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her”* (verse 7). Somehow these critics never get around to reading the 11th verse where Jesus told the woman, *“Go, and sin no more.”* You see, He wasn’t ignoring what she did. He wasn’t providing “cheap forgiveness” without cost or repentance. The Bible makes it clear that, while God loves the sinner (Rom. 5:8), He hates sin (Rev 2:15).

Paul, who wrote on love in 1 Cor 13, also chastised the Corinthians because they had accepted an incestuous man in their congregation. He commanded the church to expel that man and not even eat with him (1 Cor 5:11). Throughout the entire Bible, good conduct is praised, and sin is denounced.

It would be one of the great spiritual tragedies of our time if we allow ourselves to be seduced and corrupted by the new definition of tolerance. This definition, however, is fast becoming “institutionalized” – accepted by the vast majority through constant exposure and influence. Whether you know it or now, this deceptive doctrine – is all around you, seeping not only into your mind, but into the minds of your children. If we are not careful and alert, it will destroy us. Peter warns in 1 Pet 5:8, *“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.”*

ANNOUNCEMENTS

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