

Tolerance

How might the word “tolerance” be defined?

- 1) Merriam-Webster: “sympathy or indulgence for beliefs or practices differing from or conflicting with one’s own”
- 2) As our culture may define it: tolerance = agreeing on a point of view or belief. Disagreement is often viewed as intolerance.
- 3) As the Bible may define it: Hate (do not tolerate) sin and evil; Love people. (see Romans 12:9-21)

Some other key questions to consider and discuss:

- 1) Is disagreement the same as intolerance? (see 1 Corinthians 1:10 - agree on what?)
- 2) Why is dialogue (open discussions and debate) important when it comes to differences of opinion on sensitive cultural matters such as sexual orientation, abortion or religious beliefs? (see Acts 17:17 - in what manner do we try and reason with one another?)
- 3) Can tolerance and open dialogue be of any value if there is no such thing as absolute truth (right and wrong over all of time, places and cultures)? (see Romans 1:29-31 - what happens without the gospel of truth?)
- 4) How does one describe a person or group that preaches tolerance but who are not tolerant to people with views other than their own; who treat them badly by causing them to get fired, calling them names, and denying them the freedom of expressing their points of view? (see Matthew 23:27-28)
- 5) How might we handle conversations with others of a different world-view (atheism, humanism, etc.) who are really NOT interested in open dialogue for purposes of seeking the truth? (see 1 Timothy 6:20-21)

Some things the Bible has to say about tolerance:

- ◆ Do we keep silent with evil or dangerous cultural beliefs and practices? (Ephesians 4:15)
- ◆ What do we do when a fellow believer does something wrong against us? (Matthew 18:15-17)
- ◆ Do we really have a sinful nature and how should we deal with that when we encounter a professing Christian who regularly behaves immorally? (Matthew 18:15-17; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13)
- ◆ Should our behavior be about winning the approval of others or of God? (Galatians 1:10)
- ◆ How do we deal with those who are lazy / idle or “busybodies?” Should we treat them as an enemy or address the issue with love and respect? (2 Thessalonians 3:10-15)
- ◆ Should we engage in, or avoid, foolish arguments, especially if it involves a divisive person? (Titus 3:9-10)
- ◆ Regardless of the different opinions we may have with others, is it ever OK to treat them with anything other than love? (see Romans 12:9-21 among many other Bible passages)

Questions for personal application:

- 1) How are you handling others with opinions different from yours? How might you do this better?
- 2) How can you help others to explore ideas different from their own, with decency and respect for one another?
- 3) When discussing our opinions and points of view, how does our “world-view” (how we view the world and ourselves) affect what we believe? Is there one true world-view? Can you support your answer?
- 4) In what way might our culture be discouraging free speech and open discussions with those having different opinions? What can and should we do about that as followers of Jesus Christ?

**Our culture has been influencing the church.
It is time for the church to influence our culture!**