

Tolerance – Genuine or Counterfeit (Part 2)
(Rev. Dr. John Bartol)

- . *Counterfeit tolerance can be the enemy of justice. In order for justice to happen, there must be a basis for deciding what is right and wrong.*

Does today's tolerance mean we should accept and have no moral convictions about almost anything; even such issues as racism, ethnic cleansing, child labor or wife beating?

To me, the test of whether I am tolerant or intolerant of something depends upon whether that something is good or evil, just or unjust. For example, in the early 1930s should the citizens of Germany have been tolerant of the Nazi view, that Jews were an inferior and parasitic race? Surely, we must not turn a blind eye toward evil when we strongly believe that the very foundational stones of Western civilization are being violated. We cannot be indifferent to error when we strongly believe something to be true.

In some circles today, tolerance is a very weak word. If you tolerate someone it does not mean you love them or even like them. You simply tolerate or put up with them. The New Testament reveals that Christ was perhaps the most tolerant person who ever lived, in the best sense. But He didn't just put up with people, or simply tolerate them. He loved them with an unconditional love. He became a friend of sinners and all kinds of persecuted minorities and rejects of society.

Yet, at other times Christ also showed unconditional opposition and intolerance toward the sins and evil actions that enslaved and damned people in body and soul. He rebuked hypocrisy, selfishness and injustice in every form. To the woman taken in adultery he said, "Neither do I condemn you; go now and leave your life of sin" (John 8: 11). He forgave her, but he condemned her sin with a holy hatred.

Actually, the original meaning of tolerance came from the Christian sense of sin and fallen human nature. I have a motto on my wall that reads: "PBPWMGIFWY - Please be patient with me, God isn't finished with me yet!" Here I recognize that I have a self-centered nature along with character traits that fall far short of perfection. But genuine tolerance enables me to be somewhat at peace with my fellow sinful human beings and with my own sinful self. Tolerance means that we do not allow our differences to divide us and turn us into enemies of one another

Jesus said: "Judge not, that you be not judged" (Matthew 7:1). "Do to others whenever you would like them to do to you" (Matthew 7:12a NIV). Jesus and his followers show us how to have good judgment without being self-righteously judgmental in the process.

Mere tolerance or unconditional love?

We need to return to the realistic or classical meaning of tolerance practiced by Christ. He showed unconditional love to sinners but also unconditional opposition to evil in any form. We are given the same choice. Will our truth claim be merely tolerance, or will it be unconditional love?