

What About... Judgment and Tolerance?

BY DR. DAVID A. DEWITT

- Judgment...“the ability to make considered decisions or come to sensible conclusions.”
- Tolerant...“showing willingness to allow the existence of opinions or behavior that one does not necessarily agree with.”

[New Oxford American Dictionary]

The point I want to make here is: **Tolerance is just a form of judgment**

First, let's talk about **judgment**. Jesus said, *Do not judge so that you will not be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you* (Matthew 7:1-2). I can't tell you all Jesus had in mind here. But I do know this. We all have a *standard of measure*. It's not possible for moral creatures to avoid being judgmental. We can only avoid being judgmental in areas we don't think about. For example, I'm not judgmental about the economy in Norway because I don't think about the economy in Norway. But if I think about something (like the economy in America), then I become judgmental (making morally-based decisions) about it.

We all judge, therefore, we will all be judged. We can't keep our own moral standards. So, we will be judged by a standard we cannot keep. As Walt Hendrickson said, “If we tell God we do not like His standard, He could say, ‘Okay, we'll use your standards’” [unpublished, my recollection]. Thank God (literally) for the cross that paid for our sins (2 Corinthians 5:21).

The Jews were judging people physically, driving them out of their synagogues (John 9:22), even throwing them in prison (Acts 9:22), if they didn't keep *the traditions of the elders* (Mark 7:3).

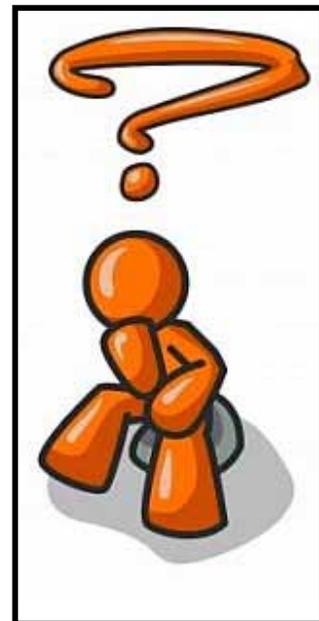
We are not to judge people like that, in the sense of giving them justice or punishment (an *eye for an eye*—Matthew 5:38-39). That's only for God (Romans 12:9) and government (Romans 13:1-5). But we are to judge in the sense of having moral discernment. Every moral command in the Bible assumes we have moral discernment. Jesus said, *on your own initiative judge what is right* (Luke 12:57), and to *judge with righteous judgment* (John 7:24). So, although we are not to use our standard of measure to punish people (like the Jewish leadership was doing), we are to take our *own initiative* to judge, in the sense of discerning

right and wrong, making moral decisions with a *righteous standard of measure*.

Now let's talk about **tolerance**. As defined above, tolerance is “showing willingness to allow the existence of opinions or behavior that one does not necessarily agree with.”

Like judgment, tolerance has a moral component we assign to it. And like judgment, it is unavoidable. Since we view everything from a moral foundation, we continually judge some things around us to be unacceptable, with no option but to show a willingness to allow their existence. We will always have a teacher, boss, neighbor, or government official (like the police officer who stops us), whose behavior we “do not necessarily agree with,” but we have to show a “willingness to allow” it. We don't have to like it, or approve of it, or agree with it, but we do have to tolerate it.

Personal Tolerance is my own individual decision to accommodate behavior I do not agree with. But when I tolerate someone or something, I have already judged that person or thing critically and negatively. I may decide to tolerate a stingy, grumpy neighbor. But only be-



cause I have already judged my neighbor as stingy and grumpy. I would not have to tolerate a generous, friendly neighbor. **So personal tolerance is just a form of personal judgment.**

Social Tolerance is the idea that everyone should accommodate a particular behavior, even if they do not agree with it. Anyone telling me to be tolerant has, first, made a judgment that a certain condition is something not normally tolerated. People only ask us to tolerate what is against some social order. There would be no need to say something should be tolerated, if the condition was accepted as normal. For example, progressives tell us to tolerate homosexual marriage, abortion-on-demand, and cohabitation before marriage. In nearly all historical cultures, those things have been considered to not be normal. No one tells us to tolerate heterosexual marriage, women having babies, or sexual abstinence before marriage, because those things have been considered normal. When we are exhorted to exercise tolerance, **a judgment has already been made.**

In addition, if I am asked or instructed to tolerate something, then I am judged if I do not tolerate it. The very assumption that something should be tolerated carries with it a continual, ongoing, judgmental attitude against anyone who does not. One cannot say it is good to be tolerant of something, without assuming it is also good to be continually judgmental against someone's intolerance. If I am told to tolerate, say, homosexual marriage, and I refuse to tolerate it, then I will be continually judged by those who are instructing me to tolerate it. Once again, we see that **tolerance is just a form of judgment.**

As with personal tolerance, a call for social tolerance is also inevitable. Unless I am living in a cave, I will encounter behavior which I believe everyone should tolerate. For example, some societies believe having a birth defect, such as club footedness, is a curse (from God or the devil or something). I believe no one should accommodate a behavior or belief that club footedness is a curse. I believe everyone should tolerate birth defects. But in saying so, I have already made a judgment against societies who have historically considered birth defects a curse. Plus, I will be continually judgmental against anyone who does not tolerate birth defects. So, again, **tolerance is just a form of judgment.**

Often, tolerance is a greater judgment. A person stating a judgment, in the sense of discerning something to be right or wrong, makes one judgment. But the person saying something should be tolerated makes an initial judgment followed by perpetual judgments. A general social call for tolerance is far more judgmental than making a judgment. It may, therefore, generate a lot more hatred. The same would be true of a call for social judgments, like the biblical Pharisees did. But that's not usually done today. If I personally judge something as wrong, I usually just don't do it.

Conclusion: Humans are creatures with moral notions. Judgment and tolerance are therefore inevitable and essential, or we would not be able to discern what is right and wrong or apply Scripture. But we should not think tolerance is without judgment.

**If you are a tolerant person,
you are a judgmental person**