



## How Do We Truthfully Tolerate<sub>(Part 1)</sub>

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"Tolerance" is the buzzword of the age. We hear it on the media waves, read it in the latest magazine, and talk about it at the coffee shop. I heard on a local Los Angeles radio program that people should be "tolerant" of certain sexual practices. I read on a New York website that people should be "tolerant" of certain ethnicities. What does it all mean?

The Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles defines "tolerance" as "a fair and objective attitude toward those whose opinions and practices differ from one's own; the commitment to respect human dignity." (Footnote 1: The Museum of Tolerance website. Glossary. ) I believe this is a decent definition. Holding people as valuable and taking their ideas seriously is at the heart of the "tolerance" issue. Not only is this deeply intuitive, but this is also a Judeo-Christian notion. "Loving your neighbor as yourself" is an old idea that dates back into the second millennia before Jesus Christ.

But "tolerance," unfortunately, has taken on different meanings in our time. Even though the Museum of Tolerance offers its definition, the consciousness of the Western world smuggles in other forms of it and pretends the new forms are part of the original. The discussion today revolves around the topic or issue that is tolerated, not around tolerance itself.

I would like to make a distinction between two kinds of tolerance by offering some definitions. I believe the issue here is between the idea of "objective" and "subjective."

A statement is "objective" when it is about an "object" in the world. A statement is "subjective" when it is about the "subject" holding the thought. "The number seven exists," is an objective statement. It is a description about the outside world. We can gather facts about it and argue the case. One day when I die, that statement will continue to be true. Everyone else, when the evidence comes in, is required to believe that the number seven exists (or else we call them dishonest or irrational).

In contrast, "I like the number seven" is a subjective statement. It is a description about my personal

tastes and desires or my personal condition. One day when I die, that statement will die with me. Nobody else is required to like the number seven. The number seven's existence does not depend on my own existence. But my liking the number seven does.

Tolerance, today, takes on new meanings when talking about "objective" vs. "subjective" things. "Objective tolerance" would be the definition at the top of this article. "Subjective tolerance" would differ. It would be like this definition: "helping others who are different from us to succeed with their differences—because those differences in the end do not matter."

When it comes to issues of morality and religion, we are talking about "objective" statements. We are not merely talking about likes and dislikes or the conditions of certain individuals. Since Western civilization began, morality and religion have been treated objectively, but that has changed.

Today, morality and religion are often treated as "subjective." Dallas Willard, philosopher and theologian at University of Southern California, says, "The push to 'pluralism' is the widely accepted view that moral distinctions are 'in the eye of the

beholder,' or at least that no one can claim to know what is really right or wrong." (Footnote 2: Dallas Willard, "No Pluralism in Moral Matters")

You see, if we are talking about things that are morally indifferent, like ethnicity or hairstyles, we can follow the rules of "subjective tolerance." We should help people flourish no matter their family history or their skin color. However, when talking about certain morals or religions, like certain sexual lifestyles or certain beliefs about the universe, we must take a stance of "objective tolerance," since understanding reality and living according to it is one of the goals of human creatures.

But distinctions get blurred. Protesting Dr. Laura's popular radio show in 2000, one of the protest organizers commented, "It is most insulting that a major network gives her a show. If you substitute the word minority for homosexual in the things she says, it wouldn't fly." (Footnote 3: Darlene D'Agostino, "Kansas Minister Delivers Messages of Intolerance to P&G," June 2000)

He is right. It wouldn't fly. But do you see what happened? In one statement, the organizer turned the object of discussion from an objective moral

topic to a subjective indifferent one. This is going on everywhere in our day.

Yet what if the universe was designed in such a way that one religion actually did give the proper explanation of the way the world is? What if the universe was so structured that certain sexual practices actually went against the way you were made? I would hope that, if this was so, we would not be shouting "intolerance" over disagreements, but rather, doing our best to arrive at the truth. We do not call disagreements in science "intolerant," but we do with morality. Sadly, many people actually think religion and certain moral claims are indifferent to life—and to say "true" or "false" is like saying yellow is better than orange. This is a major problem.

Jesus comes to us as the designer of the universe who is deeply intelligent. If He really knows what he's talking about, then that means we'd better pay attention. Not only did he tell us to "Love your neighbor," but he also firmly held that "love rejoices in truth" (see 1 Corinthians 13:6). You cannot separate the two without losing something of both.

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