

Tolerance, Charity, Compassion, Forbearance

- I. O.E.D. definitions.
 - A. tolerate: To allow to exist or to be done or practised without authoritative interference or molestation; also gen. to allow, permit.
 - B. charity: Christian love: a word representing *caritas* of the Vulgate, as a frequent rendering of ἀγάπη in N.T. Greek. With various applications: as **a.** God's love to man. (By early writers often identified with the Holy Spirit.) **b.** Man's love of God and his neighbour, commanded as the fulfilling of the Law, Matt. xxii. 37, 39.
 - C. compassion: Suffering together with another, participation in suffering; fellow-feeling, sympathy. 2. The feeling or emotion, when a person is moved by the suffering or distress of another, and by the desire to relieve it; pity that inclines one to spare or to succour.
 - D. forbearance: The action or habit of forbearing, dispensing with, refraining or abstaining from (some action or thing).

- II. Scripture requires believers to exercise discernment: making differences between right and wrong, good and evil, acceptable and unacceptable, judgment and mercy, etc. **1TH 5:21; JUDE 1:21-23.**
 - A. Making valid distinctions is the foundation of intelligent inquiry: things that are different are not the same. Declaring a thing true while also declaring its opposite as equally true is not tolerance but irrationality.
 - B. There is good to be revered, evil to be rejected (**ROM 12:9**), and perverting how these values are defined has become the basis for enshrining and legalizing what would rightly be condemned in the eyes of God and those who agree with Him. **ISA 5:20; PSA 94:20.**
 - C. Consider *compassion*, a positive trait which we should manifest in view of the way our God deals with us as weak sinners. **1PE 3:8; 1JO 3:17 c/w HEB 5:2.**
 1. Digging and dunging before axing is the general rule. **LUK 13:6-9.**
 2. Per **JUDE 1:21-23**, it is not perpetual nor beneficial for all cases. **ISA 26:10.**
 3. Sparing when one ought not to spare does not benefit the rebel. **PRO 19:18; ECC 8:11 c/w ISA 58:1.**
 4. Sparing when one is commanded to not spare also invites God's judgment. **1SAM 15:3, 23.**
 5. Faulty compassion towards someone involved in sin or destructive behaviors is hatred. Sympathy for a sinner's struggle does not mean one should sympathize with his sin. **LEV 19:17.**
 - a. Reproof from a friend is better than secret pacifying of an error in the name of love. **PRO 27:5-6.**
 - b. The proper way to show Christian love is to do what is right, not what feels good or is easy, nor what is wrong, nor what cements wrong. **1JO 5:2-3.**
 - c. Charity's softer tenets do not overrule its demands of propriety. **1CO 13:4-6.**
 6. Beware of false demands for compassion such as would deprive the healthy of their livelihood or rights in the name of public good.
 - a. Public good is best served by a thriving support by the healthy. Forced compassion for the perceived benefit of some is also the forced denial of compassion to the person who needs to work.
 - b. Hence, in Israel when communicable disease might be present, only the sick and symptomatic were quarantined. **LEV 13:2-6, 46; NUM 5:2-4.**

- III. Consider the comfort we have through Jesus Christ and His New Testament gospel.

- A. The Eternal God is ever holy and will not let sinful man into His presence. **HAB 1:13 c/w PSA 5:4-5.**
 - B. The Old Covenant only underscored His separation from man and that the best of sinners were still sinners unfit for His presence.
 - 1. His mountain was ablaze and unapproachable. **HEB 12:18-21.**
 - 2. The Ark of His Covenant was hidden behind a veil. **HEB 9:1-4.**
 - 3. No sinner could be perfected by that Old Covenant. **GAL 3:10.**
 - 4. Abundance of righteousness could not offset the sinful nature. **ISA 64:6.**
 - C. Comparing himself with this distant, holy God, Job was frustrated that God could not truly identify with him as a man who struggled against sin. **JOB 9:30-35.**
 - D. But God did come to identify with man in his struggle. **JOH 1:1-3, 14.**
 - 1. Jesus Christ was subject to imperfect human authority. **LUK 2:51.**
 - 2. Jesus Christ was subject to needs and weakness. **MAT 21:18; JOH 4:6-8; 2CO 13:4.**
 - 3. Jesus Christ was subject to temptation. **HEB 4:15.**
 - 4. But He held fast unto death, which satisfied God's wrath against us. **GAL 3:13.**
 - 5. He is not only our Savior, but our High Priest and Advocate. **HEB 7:24-25; 1JO 2:1.**
 - 6. Because of Christ, the inadequacy of the sinner is not the barrier to God but rather the incentive to approach Him. **HEB 4:16.**
 - E. As Christ walked among sinners, He was tender and gentle towards the meek according to the prophecies of Him: a caring Shepherd, not a hurtful mahout. **ISA 11:1-4; 61:1; 40:11 c/w MAT 11:28-30.**
- IV. Christ's perfect model of brotherly relating before a pure and holy God helps us in ministry and in Christian life.
- A. Although Paul would not compromise truth and its implications, he modeled his ministry after Christ's dealings with His fellows. **2CO 10:1; 1TH 2:4-8.**
 - B. As brethren, Christ's model regulates our tempers and sense of justice in consideration of the foibles of human frailty. **ROM 12:10; EPH 4:2, 32; COL 3:12; GAL 6:1.**
- V. It behooves us as members of the body to judge not only between the polarity of things but also to *judge righteous judgment* in dealing with one another. **JOH 7:24 c/w 2CO 10:7.**
- A. Judging not according to outward appearance stands against:
 - 1. partiality in judgment. **1TI 5:20-21; JAM 2:1-5.**
 - 2. the vain form of godliness. **2TI 3:4-5.**
 - 3. superficial or premature conclusions without proper investigation and consideration. **DEU 13:12-14; PRO 18:13; ISA 11:3-4 c/w JOH 7:51.**
 - a. Caution is needed to guard against prejudicial assumptions or *evil surmisings*. **1TI 6:4.**
 - b. God has the advantage in that He knows and judges what is in the hearts of men. **1SAM 16:7; HEB 4:12-13.**
 - c. We cannot fully see the heart of a man but sometimes the thoughts of the heart are revealed by reaction or behavior and this helps our assessments of character. **LUK 2:35 c/w MAT 12:34.**
 - d. "The Lord knows those that are his by name, but we must know them by their character." (Matthew Henry)
 - B. One of the first things Christ taught was to first judge ourselves to better hone our own lives and thus have credibility in judging others. **MAT 7:1-5.**

- C. God's laws and God's wisdom teach us the importance of tolerance, charity, and forbearance in relating to others, especially to brethren. **COL 3:12-14; GAL 6:10.**
1. We can opt to not take umbrage over a fault against us. **PRO 19:11; 1CO 6:7.**
 2. Charity is not high-handed nor high-minded and not easily provoked. **1CO 13:4-7.**
 3. We do well to not strain over every contrary word. **ECC 7:21-22 ct/w ISA 29:21.**
 4. We should seek to cover another's faults when possible rather than unduly exposing him. **PRO 17:9; 10:12; MAT 18:15; 1PE 4:8; JAM 5:19-20.**
 5. We dare not assume to be more righteous than God, devising extra-biblical expectations of men or not duly considering the frailty of human nature. **ECC 7:16 c/w 1TI 4:1-4; PSA 103:8-14.**
 6. Biblical Christianity is neither ridiculously permissive nor rigidly harsh. It neither tramples the law underfoot as if the law didn't really mean what it said, nor does it trample mercy underfoot. **MAT 23:23-24 c/w JAM 2:13.**
 7. Where possible, it is better to live at peace with all men (**ROM 12:18**), not at war: seeking to first save by soft words or rebukes (**PRO 15:1; 27:5**), by forbearance when offended, by covering another's faults by personal dealings rather than public exposure when possible.
 - a. Hasting to judgment to destroy when some patience and mercy might be afforded is a questionable spirit. **LUK 9:51-56.**
 - b. Publicly known sin which God forbids in His kingdom is a different matter. **1CO 5:1-5.**
 8. Compassion, mercy and forbearance towards an offender have limitations.
 - a. The man of knowledge is more accountable than the ignorant. **LUK 12:47-48.**
 - b. Some are *implacable* (cannot be reconciled or appeased): no amount of soft reasonings or intreaties moves them. This trait is sin. **ROM 1:31.**
 - c. Some are *stubborn* (dogged in refusing compliance or obedience) which is the idolizing of the individual's will (**1SAM 15:23**). Hence, Paul says of persistent sinners, "...they which DO such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (**GAL 5:21**). Where persistence in sin overrules repentance, judgment is in order. **REV 2:20-23.**
 - d. Some are *unreasonable* (irrational): you cannot reason with them because they are determined to justify themselves. **2TH 3:1-2 c/w PRO 26:16.**
 - e. Protracted leniency can embolden sinners. **ECC 8:11.**
 - f. If the form of compassion that you show someone emboldens or subsidizes his error, you have done him no favors. Remember the basic rule of human governance: do not reward bad or destructive behavior. **1PE 2:14 c/w PRO 1:32; 1KI 1:5-6.**

VI. The law of Christ which governs thought and conduct in His kingdom, the church, establishes the supreme order of what should be tolerated for community fellowship.

- A. An ungodly world may or may not agree with these principles.
 1. **1CO 5:1** is an example of a moral infraction which even the heathen rejected.
 2. The world will generally separate from murderers. **1PE 4:15.**
 3. But an unbiblical culture will permit, condone, even celebrate things like fornication, adultery, sodomy, abortion: things which God condemns in the church. This list grows and widens with increasing rapidity as men turn from God's revelation in His word and in nature. **ROM 1:28-33.**
- B. We are stuck with living in a world which tolerates what God will not. **1CO 5:9-11.**

1. We may responsibly use the fashion of this world where doing so does not violate the law of God nor give the enemies of God occasion to speak reproachfully. **1CO 7:29-31; LUK 16:9 c/w 1CO 11:20-22; 1TI 5:14; 1PE 2:15-16.**
 2. We may not conform to the world where Scripture tells us otherwise. **EXO 23:2; ROM 12:2; 2CO 6:14-17; MAT 6:5-7.**
 3. Faithful saints have always been constituted a parallel society in the world and in some seasons they will not be well-tolerated because of this. Often, it is not what one does that incurs the wrath of the ungodly but what one will not do: conform and comply. **DAN 6:10.**
 4. There are seasons when those who fear God need to be more concerned with *saving themselves from an evil culture* than saving the culture. **ZEC 2:7; ACT 2:40.**
 5. Doing what is good and right regardless of its unpopularity is always the best course since it pleases God and provides contrast to a dark world. **MAT 5:14-16; PHIL 2:14-15.**
- C. Unlike the Law of Moses which empowered the church to execute temporal punishment for behavior which God did not tolerate, the Law of Christ only empowers the church to separate offenders from its membership and turn them over to Satan, or to the world for appropriate carnal punishments. **1CO 5:5; 1TI 1:19-20.**
1. The Law of Moses tolerated bigamy, etc. **DEU 21:15.**
 2. The Law of Moses tolerated easy divorce and remarriage. **DEU 24:1-2.**
 3. The Law of Christ tolerates neither of these. **MAT 19:3-9.**
 4. Neither the *Law of Moses* nor the *Law of Christ* nor the *Law of Nature* tolerate perverse sexual relationships like sodomy. **LEV 18:22; 1CO 6:9; ROM 1:26-27.**
 - a. This “threefold cord” (**ECC 4:12**) is very binding on mankind. Even in the absence of the written revelation, the creation itself will judge such tolerance. Nature teaches and judges those who reject its message. **1CO 11:14; JUDE 1:10; ROM 1:27.**
 - b. This agreement of principle in both written and natural revelation is a key to sorting out what society should and should not tolerate.
 - c. Civilizations self-destruct where such perversions are tolerated, then celebrated, then codified.
 - d. “Cicero (Tuscul. Ques. iv. 34) says, that ‘Dicearchus had accused Plato of it, and probably not unjustly. He also says (Tuscul. Q. iv. 33), that the practice was common among the Greeks, and that their poets and great men, and even their learned men and philosophers, not only practiced, but gloried in it. And he adds, that it was the custom, not of particular cities only, but of Greece in general. (Tuscul. Ques. v. 20.) Xenophon says, that “the unnatural love... is so common, that in many places it is established by the public laws...”

“The meaning of this doubtless is, that the effect of such base and unnatural passions was, to enfeeble the body, to produce premature old age, disease, decay, and an early death. That this is the effect of the indulgence of licentious passions, is amply proved by the history of man. The despots who practice polygamy, and keep harems in the East, are commonly superannuated at forty years of age; and it is well known, even in Christian countries, that the effect of licentious indulgence is to break down and destroy the constitution. How much more might this be expected to follow the practice of the vice specified in the verse under examination! God has

marked the indulgence of licentious passions with his frown. Since the time of the Romans and the Greeks, as if there had not been sufficient restraints before, he has originated a new disease, which is one of the most loathsome and distressing which has ever afflicted man, and which has swept off millions of victims. But the effect on the body was not all. It tended to debase the mind; to sink man below the level of the brute; to destroy the sensibility; and to ‘sear the conscience as with a hot iron.’ The last remnant of reason and conscience, it would seem, must be extinguished in those who would indulge in this unnatural and degrading vice...”

(Albert Barnes Commentary re: ROM 1:27)

- e. “How early these were in full career, in the history of the world, the case of Sodom affectingly shows; and because of such abominations, centuries after that, the land of Canaan ‘spued out’ its old inhabitants. Long before this chapter was penned, the Lesbians and others throughout refined Greece had been luxuriating in such debasements; and as for the Romans, Tacitus, speaking of the emperor Tiberius, tells us that new words had then to be coined to express the newly invented stimulants to jaded passion. No wonder that, thus sick and dying as was this poor humanity of ours under the highest earthly culture, its many-voiced cry for the balm in Gilead, and the Physician there, ‘Come over and help us,’ pierced the hearts of the missionaries of the Cross, and made them ‘not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ!’” (Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Commentary, re: ROM 1:27)
 - f. Unnatural lusts are called *confusion* in **LEV 18:23; 20:12** and “...God is not the author of confusion...” (**1CO 14:33**). Therefore such unnatural lusts cannot be designed nor condoned by God in men.
 - g. Ignoring or defying nature is not a solution to life’s trials, turmoils or impulses. The solution is Jesus Christ Who is able to cure and correct the mind which Satan has exploited. **MAR 5:15 c/w COL 1:21-22; ISA 26:3.**
 - h. Paul’s words to Corinth guide us to a godly blend of compassion and conviction towards sinners: his identifying with sinners was with an eye to human weakness under the bondage of a lie from which Christ sets men free, not by affirming the sinner’s sin. **1CO 6:9-11.**
 - i. Paul’s accommodation of all men affirmed rather the subjugation of the body, not surrender to its lusts. **1CO 9:22-27.**
 - j. Paul knew that he was as susceptible to ungodly lusts as any man. **ROM 7:8, 18-21.**
 - k. Paul warned believers about giving in to the vanity of their mind and so be given over to ungodly lusts. **EPH 4:17-20.**
- D. “Tolerance applies only to persons, but never to truth. Intolerance applies only to truth, but never to persons. Tolerance applies to the erring; intolerance to the error.” (Fulton J. Sheen)
 - E. “The truth cannot be hateful however, except in the eyes of those who hate the truth.” (Michael Hoffman)
 - F. It is not hateful to hate sin. It is not hateful to declare hope and deliverance for sinners. It is, however, hateful to subsidize, solidify, approve, affirm, celebrate, or codify sinful behavior which is manifestly an offense to God and nature.