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How Tolerant Should Love Be?

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It is easy to attribute qualities to love that it doesn't actually possess. In part this may happen because we attach various meanings to it that come from culture or sentimentality or our own personal weakness. There is no doubt that love must be tolerant, able to bear the weaknesses and mistakes of others:

- "Love suffers long and is kind ... hopes all things, endures all things" – 1 Cor 13:4, 7.
- "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" – Gal 6:2.
- "Comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all" – 1 Th 5:14.
- "A servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient ..." – 2 Tim 2:24.

Such admonitions, together with a natural dislike for confrontation and cultural pressure to praise everyone no matter how degenerate, may create a reluctance to deal with real problems and threats to a local church or to one's community or family.

But the NT also speaks to the dangers of unlimited tolerance. To refuse to draw some lines and fellowship the intolerable is not loving and may actually incur God's wrath.

Tolerating immorality in the church. The most obvious example of this is the Corinthians' continued fellowship with an incestuous brother. Paul is incredulous that this is not only tolerated but the Corinthians are boastful of it: "It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you ... as is not even named ... mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you" (5:1-2). The loving thing to do for both the offender and the church is to purge the man from the fellowship in hope that such ostracism might penetrate his hardened heart.

Another example is Thyatira's tolerance of Jezebel: "I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and beguile My servants to commit sexual immorality and to eat things sacrificed to idols" (Rev 2:20). His judgment against Jezebel: "I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children with death. And all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts ..." (2:23).

Was Jezebel a brazen hussy who cowed the weak? Was she intellectually intimidating and brash toward opponents? What we do know is that the Lord was not pleased with Thyatira's inaction. We are in a bad place when we favor that which the Lord opposes.

Tolerating false teachers. Whoever the "elect lady" was whom John addressed in his second epistle, he cautioned her against "deceivers who have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist" (2 Jn 7). He further warns the elect lady: "If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds" (2 Jn 10-11). This sounds awfully rude; what is John saying? He is saying, "Don't aid and abet those who have turned against the

faith.” Just as the one who receives a prophet shares in his reward (Mt 10:41), by contrast the one who assists a false teacher shares in his guilt. Politeness must take a back seat to principle.

The Lord commends the Ephesian church for its intolerance in this regard: “I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars” (Rev 3:3).

No one (who is normal) likes confrontation of this kind. It is hard to call out a false teacher, and such men prey on the natural timidity of good people. They are bold and confident and project scholarship, and this intimidates others into tolerating them even while troubled by them. Homer Hailey observes on such evil men, “If they will not be transformed, let them be transferred” (*Commentary on Revelation* 121). In other words, “note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple” (Rom 16:17-18).

Hailey notes further: “In an age when we pride ourselves in tolerance and compromise, this attitude might appear bigoted and intolerant. Bigoted, no; intolerant, yes, but an intolerance commended by the Lord. Churches would do well today to follow such a course with their intellectually oriented teachers and leaders who pervert truth and make boastful claims for their own human wisdom” (ibid).

Other examples:

- The Lord didn’t tolerate Ananias and Sapphira, who were stricken dead for their lying and self-aggrandizement (Ac 5:1-11).
- Paul didn’t tolerate Barnabas’ suggestion of taking John Mark on the second preaching trip, and the two parted ways (Ac 15:36-41).
- John, the “apostle of love,” had zero tolerance for Diotrephes and his rejection of the apostles and domineering of the church (3 Jn).

The obvious challenge is knowing when to be patient and when to draw a line. Elders struggle with how much to say, when to say it, how strong their words should be, etc. Is it a matter of personal weakness? Are there signs of neglect and drifting? Will time take care of it? Is someone truly mistaken, or do they have a darker agenda? Are subtle hints being ignored? Is direct intervention needed before greater damage is done?

These are hard calls that we all must make at times in family friction, neighbor relations, co-worker shenanigans, etc. We run the risk of blowback by confronting untenable situations. What to do? Pray. Seek advice. Assess your motives. Look down the road and measure the consequences of action vs. inaction. Then act – with correction or censure or rejection – in love (1 Cor 13:1-3). The Centreville Journal

Fault Finding

- by Greg Gwin

Did you ever notice how easy it is for us to see faults in others and at the same time excuse the identical errors in our own lives? For instance, if someone else takes a long time to complete a job, I say he is ‘slow.’ If I take a long time, I see myself as being ‘thorough.’ If some other person does not do something, I think he is ‘lazy.’ If I don’t do it, it’s because I’m ‘too busy.’ If another does not extend a courtesy, I conclude that he is ‘thoughtless’ and ‘rude.’ If I omit the same deed, it is because it was not brought to my attention.

Too often we become professional critics. We can see and point out the slightest flaws in the performance of others while carefully guarding and excusing our own shortcomings. Jesus warned about such hyper-critical judgments in Matthew 7:1-5, “And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? . . . Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother’s eye.”

It is important to note that Jesus did not encourage us to ignore the problems that exist in the lives of others. In fact, in

John 7:24 he commanded us to "judge righteous judgment". But the obvious point is that we need to correct our own errors before we can be in a position to help others.

Perhaps my brother truly is slow, lazy, or thoughtless. When I'm certain that I have control of these same problems in my own life, then I can help him "in the spirit of meekness" (Gal. 6:1). Think! Collegevue Electronic Beacon