



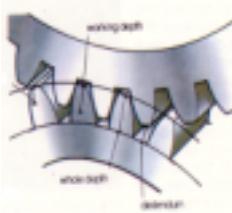
Tolerance & Legalism

Luke 10:11-12 -- Even the dust of your city which clings to your feet, we wipe off in protest against you; yet be sure of this, that the kingdom of God has come near. I say to you, it will be more tolerable in that day for Sodom, than for that city.

Introduction

1. It is understandable that people wrestle with the yoke of rule. On the one hand, some people do not like to be told what to do. This may be a good thing if they are under the rule of tyrants.
2. On the other hand, some people desire to be told what to do because they do not relish the responsibility of having to make decisions. This is a comfortable state, but may develop a people too dependent on others.
3. God has the perfect meld of these states. First, His yoke is easy and His burden is light. He knows that we need some rules and restrictions for our own good to help protect us, to guard us and to guide us.
4. Then, He also is patient, longsuffering and merciful, letting us get the feel of testing our world and His love so that we can make proper judgments and accept, not only our responsibilities joyously, but also our own cross lovingly.
5. For those who just want to do what they want to do, no matter how wrong, and expect God and Christians to be tolerant of them, even while they mock Christians as "legalists" when they are shown they have no authority for their practices, we offer these arguments and Scriptures.

A. Defining Tolerance



Definitions from American Heritage Dictionary

1. The capacity for or practice of allowing or respecting the nature, beliefs, or behavior of others.
2. a. Leeway for variation from a standard. b. The permissible deviation from a specified value of a structural dimension.

1. Off hand, it is hard to find much use that God has for the first definition. God does allow men to be free moral agents, that is, He gives them the latitude to go their own way, however, there is no indication that He is at all pleased when they do. He is like a parent being tolerant of a child learning to grow, but, likewise, like a good parent, He lays down guidelines, rules, limitations, and discipline along with His love.
2. He may be patient, forbearing, and longsuffering, but eventually He determines when enough is enough and then deals out retribution. Witness the flood.
3. As for those who profess to be His people, there is no tolerance for the worship of other gods (Exodus 20:3-5). As for the intolerance of God when it comes to error and sinful perversions, He can be down right bigoted: "Having strong conviction or prejudice, especially in matters of religion... intolerant of those who differ with..."

Deuteronomy 18:10-13 -- There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, one who uses divination, one who practices witchcraft, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who casts a spell, or a medium, or a spiritualist, or one who calls up the dead. For whoever does these things is detestable to the Lord; and because of these detestable things the Lord your God will drive them out before you...

1 Corinthians 6:9-10 -- ...Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God.

4. Concerning the second definition, laws themselves often allow tolerance in certain areas. Thus one can be an adherent to law, and still be tolerant within the boundaries that the law prescribes.

5. If a true Christian is forgiving and merciful, he is not doing it because he is more tolerant than God, but because God has shown him that there are certain times when mercy and forgiveness need to be applied.

Matthew 6:14 -- For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

2 Corinthians 2:6-9 -- Sufficient for such a one is this punishment which was inflicted by the majority, so that on the contrary you should rather forgive and comfort him, lest somehow such a one be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. Wherefore I urge you to reaffirm your love for him. For to this end also I wrote that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things.

6. If a true Christian does not make a big deal out of some things, it is because God says it is a matter of one's own judgment and has nothing to do with the councils of Christ's law. But God has to specify these areas, not that individual.

Romans 14:2 -- One man has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only.

Romans 14:5 -- One man regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Let each man be fully convinced in his own mind.

Romans 14:17 -- For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

7. All of this can be illustrated by the second definition. With a gear assembly, the measurements of the teeth must be smaller than the gaps into which they fit. If the gap is too small or the teeth too broad the gears will not mesh. Some tolerance is built into the measurements for allowance of manufacturing standards so that the maximum amount of manufactured parts will fit. However, if the tolerance is too great the gears will slip from the gaps and the gear assembly will be useless.
8. Revolvers for the military are also manufactured with greater tolerance so that they can be dropped in dirty water and still shoot. However, the parts must be engineered with tighter tolerances if the piece is to be used for precision target practice. God is also less tolerant for the assembling of better people.

B. Defining Legalism

Legal: 1. Of, relating to, or concerned with law.

2. a. Authorized by or based on law. b. Established by law; statutory.

Legalism: Strict. Literal adherence to law.

Legalist: One who practices legalism.

1. Where a Christian is concerned, it is not a bad thing to be called a legalist. In truth, there should be a great desire on the part of a Christian to do the things that God wants done and to do them His way.
2. Yet this is not merely a logical position, but a position derived from the directives of God and His law.
3. First of all, what God has delivered to us is constantly stated as law. In the Old Testament it was the Law of Moses (1 Corinthians 9:9). In the New Testament, it is described as the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2); the law of God (Romans 7:22; 8:7); the Law of the Spirit of Life (Romans 8:2); the perfect law of Liberty (James 1:27).
4. Second, even the gospel (good news) is described as something that needs to be obeyed (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9; 1 Peter 4:17).
5. Third, note Jesus' statement concerning those He does not recognize.

Matthew 7:21-23 -- Not everyone who says to Me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?" And then I will declare to them, I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness."

6. In this sense, Jesus was a legalist. He taught that there were not many ways or religions to get to heaven, but only one (John 14:6). In this Jesus was also very INtolerant.

7. Moses also was a legalist.

Deuteronomy 4:2 -- You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you.

8. The Apostles were also those who preached a strict adherence to the law of God to the exclusion of all other beliefs and faiths.

1 Corinthians 4:6 -- Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that in us you might learn not to exceed what is written, in order that no one of you might become arrogant in behalf of one against the other.

Galatians 1:8-9 -- But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you. Let him be accursed.

Ephesians 4:4-6 -- There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

2 John 9 -- Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son.

Revelation 22:18-19 -- I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God shall add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.

C. Closing Considerations and Application

1. It is one thing to have a certain philosophy of life and quite another to put it into practice. So how tolerant should a person be? If I gave one of the children here one of my keys and told them to go make a nice long, bright, shiny mark down the full length of your car, how long would you sit there and let them?
2. If you believe that there is (and should be) a standard of morality, you are an intolerant legalist to some extent or other.
3. If you believe that there is a difference between right and wrong, you are an intolerant legalist. In most civilized societies this is preferred to outlaws, pirates, rogues, thugs, robbers, sociopaths and general childish behavior.
4. The truth is, everyone draws the line somewhere, i.e.: child abuse, Satanism, murder, etc. But without God's law to determine definitely and specifically, it is only one's opinion, and even the worse crimes can be justified without divine guidelines.
5. There is also a very hard line between being loving and gutless. When people do not take a stand because they are uncertain, or afraid of the opposition, or scared of not being accepted or loved, they are spineless and not just tolerant and understanding.
6. To put it another way, why are they not tolerant of those who believe in morals, ethics, right, law and God? This is inconsistent!

Romans 2:6-10 -- Who will render to every man according to his deeds: to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation. There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, but glory and honor and peace to every man who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.