

Call to Obedience #504  
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## The Line between Tolerance and Intolerance

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Following are some examples of tolerance and intolerance to think about:

- Ananias and Sapphira were struck dead for just telling one lie. That is intolerance. But Judas lived a lie every day for three years as a disciple of Jesus. That is tolerance.
- God forbade Moses to enter into the promised land over just one transgression. That is intolerance. But God fed His complaining and disobedient people for 40 years with bread from the sky and water out of a rock. That is tolerance.
- Paul said that whosoever does not love Christ is accursed (1 Cor. 16:22). That is intolerance. Yet he also said: *Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will... What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in that I rejoice...* (Phil. 1:15-18 ESV). That is tolerance.

King Solomon said there is a time and season for everything. But when is the time to be tolerant and when is the time to be intolerant? When is the time to be long-suffering and undergirding, and when is the time to reprove and correct? Most assuredly, the question should not really be *where* and *when* to draw the line, as much as *who* should draw the line. And this brings us to the three types of man mentioned in the New Testament: the natural man, the carnal/fleshly man and the spiritual man.

**The natural man.** The natural man is the man who has never been born again. His heart has never been the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. Paul tells us clearly that the natural man does not perceive or understand the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him (1 Cor. 2:14). Hence, the natural man is totally incapable of knowing where to draw the lines between the tolerable and the intolerable with regard to the workings of God. To him, spiritual men look like fools.

**The carnal/fleshly man.** The carnal/fleshly man was saved and born of the Spirit, but he has backslidden. He has lost his first love (Rev. 2:3-4). That is, he now loves something else more than God. Yet, if we love anything more than God, we are in idolatry. We are the enemies of Christ. Yet we may go to church, say beautiful prayers and give sacrificially to the work of missions. However, none of these things are substitutes for loving God with all our heart. God wants our hearts. If He does not have that, we are amongst the walking dead. As Paul says: *For to set the mind on the flesh [carnally minded] is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot* (Rom. 8:6-7). God has no kind words to say about the carnal/fleshly man.

Most church people are in the flesh. For example, see what Paul said to the Corinthians: *for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way?* (1 Cor. 3:3) and it has been that way ever since—most people in our churches *are still of the flesh*. Peter also speaks about the fleshly backslider: *For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them* (2 Peter 2:20-21). God does not hesitate to destroy the same people He once saved as we also see in 1 Cor. 10:1-5; Jude 1:5; and Rev. 3:16.

You can see from all this that the carnal/fleshly man is totally incapable of drawing a line between that which is tolerable and that which is intolerable, between that which is right and that which is wrong. Yet sadly, it is this type of man who makes most of the decisions in most of our churches!

**The spiritual man.** The spiritual man is a man who was born of the Spirit of God, and he walks in the Spirit. The spiritual man is a new creation, more marvelous than the creation of the entire universe (because this universe will perish, but the spiritual man will live and reign forever). Because the spiritual man listens to and obeys the Spirit of God, **he is capable of judging everything.** Again, Paul says: *The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one* (1 Cor. 2:15). That man, the man of the Spirit, alone has authority to draw the line between good and evil, and between now or later.

In short, there is a total collision between the carnal/fleshly man and the spiritual man in our churches. The former is an instrument of the Evil One to deceive, destroy and devour; the latter is the instrument of God, to reconcile man to God and to fit him for the sky. And this is the reason for almost all turmoil in our churches. This is the reason why most pastors in these churches eventually become sacrificial lambs—sooner or later being driven out of their pulpits. It is what sent Jesus to the cross, and it will take every true man of God to the cross as well. As Jesus said: *A disciple is not above his teacher... It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher...* (Matt. 10:24-25). Carnal/fleshly minds are more concerned about saving the doctrine than of saving the sinner. That makes their judgments predictable, merciless and unloving. A good example is the Pharisees, who wanted to stone the adulterous woman, but Jesus saw a broken heart. Being led by the Holy Spirit, He said to her instead: *...go, and from now on sin no more* (John 8:11). The Pharisees were stunned at Jesus' unpredictability and His disregard of their laws in this case and in every case. Yet this unpredictability, looking at each case individually before judging, is a consequence of the Spirit filled life as Jesus said to Nicodemus: *The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit* (John 3:8).

Or look at the parable of the laborers in the vineyard to see how God judges. Some of the laborers came to work early, others at midday, and yet others in the last hour of the working day. Jesus said the owner of the vineyard paid them all the same. The laborers who came in the first hour complained that they should have been paid more than those who just came for the last hour. Their judgment of what is right was: equal pay for equal work. They did not care whether the families of the latecomers had food on the table that night or not. But God did. God wants to feed all of us. Only God knows the entire situation of each and every one of us. A father and son traveled by train, and his son cried incessantly, disturbing the others. When somebody finally complained, the father said the reason why his son was crying was because his son's mother was in a wooden box in the train car behind them. Oh, let us be careful how we judge!

And what then is the basis for all of God's judgments? It is this: God Is Good. The goodness of God is one of the most fundamental characteristics of His nature. He never has and never will change His character, as a zebra will never change its stripes. Our only difficulty is seeing His goodness through all of His actions and through the fog we find ourselves in until we see Him face-

to-face. But this all ceases to be a problem to us once we accept the fact that *God's ways are higher than our ways, and His ways are past finding out*. But once we cross the Great Divide, we shall see and understand completely that God has been good and right all the time. God was as good to Joseph when he was in the pit as when he was in the palace. God was as good to Paul and Silas when they were beaten and their feet were placed in the stocks as He was good to them when they were preaching under the anointing.

And here is another key: the Holy Spirit is a mover. The first mention we have of the Holy Spirit in Scripture is that of the Spirit *...hovering over the face of the waters* (Gen. 1:2). When God's creation stopped on the sixth day, the Holy Spirit kept moving and brooding, and He will keep doing so until the end of time. In other words, as long as the winds blow through our lands, pollinate our flowers and stir up the seas, the Holy Spirit will keep doing so in matters of the kingdom of God. He moved those great men: Enoch, Noah, Abraham, the judges, the prophets and the apostles. He moved thousands and millions of His people, even the most common of them, for He is not a respecter of persons. God fills every man who obeys His spirit to move in and with Him. As we see the Holy Spirit in action on the first page of the Bible, so we see Him in action on the last page of the Bible saying: *The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come...* (Rev. 22:17).

In conclusion, our natural eye cannot see God's goodness in His dealings such as when He fired Moses after he struck the rock, the way Jesus handled Judas or the way the Holy Spirit dealt with Ananias and Sapphira. Yet in the end, we shall all see how God's goodness was at work in all of these matters: *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose* (Rom. 8:28). God is never wrong and neither will we be as long as we are led by the Holy Spirit. Once more, who then shall draw the line between the tolerable and the intolerable? It is the spiritual man: *The spiritual person judges all things...* (1 Cor. 2:15).

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