

The Intolerance of Tolerance

Why are so many people mad at Christians lately? Why are followers of Jesus often lumped in with other “religious fundamentalists” as a dangerous threat to liberty in America? In this workshop, Greg Koukl will suggest that the heart of the problem is confusion about tolerance. In fact, things have become so twisted that what used to be called “tolerance” is now intolerance. In this insightful analysis, Greg will outline what happened to cause the definition of tolerance to go topsy-turvy. He will expose what he calls the myth of neutrality and the myth of tolerance, and teaches a simple method to disarm the “tolerance trick.” He will then close by sharing what happened when he lectured to a packed audience at a major U.S. university.

Greg Koukl is the founder and President of Stand to Reason, an organisation that trains Christians to think more clearly about their faith and to make an even-handed, incisive, yet gracious defense for classical Christianity and classical Christian values in the public square. He received his Masters in Philosophy of Religion and Ethics at Talbot School of Theology, graduating with high honors, and his Masters in Christian Apologetics from Simon Greenleaf University. He is an adjunct professor in Christian apologetics at Biola University. He is the author of *Tactics—A Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions*, *Relativism: Feet Firmly Planted in Mid-Air* with Francis J. Beckwith, and *Precious Unborn Human Persons*. He has hosted his own radio talk show for over 20 years advocating clear-thinking Christianity and defending the Christian worldview.

I. Confusion about Tolerance and “Dangerous” Christians

II. The Myth of Neutrality

A. Those who proclaim neutrality do have a moral point of view, and they’re very happy to impose it on others.

B. Such neutrality seems virtuous, but there’s no benefit, only danger.

C. Institutionalized neutrality: values clarification

III. Pluralism Is False

A. To avoid making a religious truth claim and remain truly pluralistic:

1. One, all religions are equally valid because...
2. Two, God does exist, but He doesn't care about the details.

B. However, both of these are knowledge claims about God that must be defended, not just asserted.

IV. The Tolerance Trick

A. When someone calls you intolerant, always ask for a definition: "What do you mean by 'intolerant'?" This is important because it shows that by the definition they are using against you, even they would qualify as intolerant.

B. "You're intolerant" is not a meaningful or substantive response.

1. It's simple name calling, an *ad hominem*.
2. The important thing is to stop wasting time on name-calling and spend our effort trying to figure out what is really true.
3. People are very confused about what tolerance actually is.

V. The Twisting of Tolerance

A . The way to escape the trap is to reject this modern distortion of word “tolerance” and return to the classical view of tolerance.

B. Postmodernism turns tolerance into intolerance.

1. The postmodern view of tolerance turns classical tolerance on its head.

2. Those with politically incorrect views become legitimate targets for public scorn and are not tolerated, ironically.

VII. True Tolerance

A. Three elements of tolerance

1. To allow or to permit

2. To recognize and respect others’ beliefs and practices without sharing them

3. To bear or put up with someone or something not necessarily liked

B. Notice that we can’t tolerate someone unless we disagree with him. This is critical.

1. We don’t “tolerate” people who share our views.

2. Tolerance is reserved for those we think are wrong.

C. This essential element of tolerance—disagreement—has been completely lost in the modern distortion of the concept. Nowadays, if you think someone is wrong, you're called intolerant.

D. Three faces of tolerance:

1. First, tolerance of persons—all people are equal.
2. Second tolerance of behavior, basically our liberty to act because all behaviors are equal.
3. Third, tolerance of ideas.

E. Most of what passes for tolerance today is nothing more than intellectual cowardice, a fear of intelligent engagement.

1. Those who brandish the word “intolerant” are unwilling to be challenged by other views, to grapple with contrary opinions, or even consider them.
2. It is easier to hurl an insult—“you intolerant bigot”—than to confront an idea and either refute it or be changed by it.
3. In the postmodern era, “tolerance” has become intolerance.