

And What About Tolerance?

America today is full of clichés. We swing around catch phrases at the slightest provocation, and rarely do we know their true meaning. The issue of tolerance is just one of those issues.

“How is tolerance an issue?” you may ask. Isn’t tolerance simply “the capacity for respecting the opinions or practices of others,” as *Webster’s* defines it? That has been the definition of tolerance for many years. One would be very hard-pressed to find any fault in that definition, for it only makes sense that human beings need to respect one another to get along on this crowded little planet. Today’s understanding of tolerance, however, has changed drastically—right under our very noses.

By far the most poignant example of this new definition of tolerance was displayed in the tidal wave of media that followed the tragic beating and killing of Matt Shepard, a University of Wyoming student. America was united in mourning that anyone could kill a fellow human quite so brutally—but, then, the mudslinging began. Investigators soon found that Shepard was a homosexual. Tempers roared—this was a “hate crime” of the first degree! Who could possibly have caused this deep hatred of homosexuals? Human Rights Campaign spokeswoman Kim Mills made clear her belief: “a climate of *intolerance*...fostered by religious political organizations such as the Family Research Council, Focus on the Family and the Christian Coalition.” [emphasis added] Focus on the Family, the Christian Coalition, and the Family Research Council fostering *intolerance*? Has the definition of tolerance changed? According to Mills’ statement, intolerance is no longer disrespect or hatred of those

who have difference beliefs than us. Intolerance has become simply declaring that another's opposing view is false—even while loving the other person! That is what these groups have done in declaring that homosexuality is wrong. Not once any one of these groups denounced homosexuals as being less valuable than any other person in any way. They have, however, clearly stated that the Bible calls homosexuality a sin, disobedience against God. Is this what “intolerance” has become?

Josh McDowell writes the following about today's tolerance:

But today's definition—the one our kids are being taught—is vastly different. It says “every individual's beliefs, values, lifestyles, and truth claims are equal.” In other words, all beliefs are equal. All values are equal. All lifestyles are equal. All truth is equal.

Matthew Shepard's murder was definitely a tragedy, and his killers should certainly receive their due punishment. It is also a tragedy—perhaps not a greater one, but certainly much more widespread—that groups who declare their beliefs would be tried and convicted as the cause of Matthew's death. We must turn from this dangerous trend and return the true definition of tolerance. We desperately need to begin drawing the lines between right and wrong in America today. And, in the process, we must remember to respect and love one another in the process. (Otherwise, we will end up in the same boat as Reverend Fred Phelps, who displays his hate for the sin of homosexuality *and* the homosexual at every possible opportunity.) We need to wake up and return to tolerance as it is meant to be.