

“You’re Not Entitled To My Approval”

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Perhaps like you, I read editorial pieces in the newspaper and letters to the editor in which there are continual pleas for acceptance of a lifestyle, a viewpoint, or some course of action. The words “tolerant” and “tolerance,” in their various forms, are usually included somehow. In thinking about such matters, it seems that a few points of observation and clarification are in order, both for myself, and for those who demand certain actions from me.

First, there are many things I tolerate but do not approve, if by tolerate we mean that I do not force someone to change their behavior. I recognize that there are those around us who live the “alternate lifestyle” of homosexuality. I do not believe that I am to use violence or force to compel them to desist. Jesus saw those about Him who did that which was wrong, and yet He did not attempt to compel them to change (cf. the rich, young ruler [Matt. 19:16-22]; those disciples who walked not after Him [John 6:65]; the Samaritans, whom James and John wanted to destroy [Luke 9:51-56]). John the Baptist lectured to those who came to hear him, and advised them to make correction in their lives (Luke 3:1-14). However, he did not use force to enact the change. So, while I realize that some abusive and criminal situations may demand intervention, and the government “beareth not the sword in vain” (Rom. 13:1-5), there are sinful behaviors in which people may engage, and I endure their presence to some degree.

Second, I can only approve that which Jehovah approves. As a Christian I recognize that He establishes what is right and wrong, while my responsibility is to uphold what He has declared. This divine right to legislate morality is reflected in the words of the prophet Isaiah, “Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!” (5:20). The principles of right and wrong do not change with the years, or with cultural mores. They are immutable, and my convictions in upholding them must be unmovable.

Finally, while I may tolerate (i.e., not remove by force) elements at odds with God’s will, I will speak out against them. In the imprecise speech of opinion, the concept of tolerance becomes abruptly and carelessly replaced by that of approval. Suddenly one is intolerant if they do not approve of what others are doing. As a Christian, this distinction is significant for me and my conduct. While I have no right to take the law into my own hands, neither do I have the right to call “evil good, and good evil.” Nor would I want to. Thus, those who violate Jehovah’s laws are not entitled to and will not receive my approval for their actions. My highest obligation is not to society, my country, or my fellow man. It is to my God. I will give my support to that which He champions, and that may mean withholding approval from my fellow humans. I am content with that course.

My approval is a precious possession. I will extend it only when I can do so with the approval of Jehovah. I may tolerate the presence of evil, but I will not sanction it. I cannot. My Lord died to remove evil (1 John 3:8), and I will do everything I can to continue His cause.