



# The Intolerance of Tolerance

*D.A. Carson*

[Download now](#)

[Read Online](#) 

# The Intolerance of Tolerance

D.A. Carson

## The Intolerance of Tolerance D.A. Carson

Tolerance currently occupies a very high place in Western societies: it is considered gauche, even boorish, to question it. In *The Intolerance of Tolerance*, however, questioning tolerance -- or, at least, contemporary understandings of tolerance -- is exactly what D. A. Carson does.

Carson traces the subtle but enormous shift in the way we have come to understand tolerance over recent years -- from defending the rights of those who hold different beliefs to affirming all beliefs as equally valid and correct. He looks back at the history of this shift and discusses its implications for culture today, especially its bearing on democracy, discussions about good and evil, and Christian truth claims.

Using real-life examples that will sometimes arouse laughter and sometimes make the blood boil, Carson argues not only that the "new tolerance" is socially dangerous and intellectually debilitating but also that it actually leads to genuine intolerance of all who struggle to hold fast to their beliefs.

## The Intolerance of Tolerance Details

Date : Published January 31st 2012 by Eerdmans (first published November 1st 2009)

ISBN : 9780802831705

Author : D.A. Carson

Format : Hardcover 196 pages

Genre : Religion, Theology, Nonfiction, Cultural, Philosophy

 [Download The Intolerance of Tolerance ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online The Intolerance of Tolerance ...pdf](#)

**Download and Read Free Online The Intolerance of Tolerance D.A. Carson**

---

# From Reader Review The Intolerance of Tolerance for online ebook

## Bob says

I liked the book but there is nothing new here. If you have read books dealing with post modernism, relativism, the downside of political correctness then this will be a review. However Carson does an excellent job defining old tolerance and contrasting it with the new tolerance, which he defines for us as well. He explains how the new tolerance calls for the acceptance of another's position believing that the position to be true or at least as true as your own position. This is a shift from allowing contrary opinions in the marketplace of ideas to the outright acceptance of all opinions now. Carson then continues the pursuit of unpacking the slide from the "old" to the "new" tolerance from the historical past to how it now presents itself in our present culture.

---

## David says

This book would be much better if Dr. Carson didn't quote so much from another book he wrote. Other than that foible, a solid book that explains what true tolerance is and how false tolerance seems to rule the day.

---

## Dan Lacich says

Love the distinction between the "old" tolerance which respected the person but vigorously debated ideas and the "new" tolerance which refuses to debate the substance of things and instead attacks the person for not being tolerant

---

## Tim Woody says

D.A. Carson in usual style provides a clear and enjoyable analysis of the Tolerance of our age showing how it really is intolerance. This book will take you on a eye opening walk through the history of how we lost true tolerance. My only critique is that D.A Carson's Historical Pri-mil and political theology leaves a distinctly defeatist taste in some sections. But that inst as much a criticism as it is a preference. Either way anyone would benefit from this short look at tolerance in the Western world. Readability 9/10 Content 9/10

---

## Jeanie says

It seems we are at the point in our culture if one disagrees with another on any issue, that person is intolerant, a hater, a bigot, a right wing extremist and I am sure the list will go on. The first thing DA Carson does in

this helpful book for Christians who want to pursue truth, is define tolerance. We are now living in a new tolerance. Heaven forbid if we think someone else is wrong. However, WE all need to examine the issues, the implications and the future rights. It seems to me that someone's rights are being neglected. When you take the abortion issue, it is the mother's rights vs the child she is carrying. And the wording of these issues are curcial as well. Or the rights of parents to teach their children what is wrong and what is right, while the schools are indoctrinal mode. However, it all comes to what we base our source on this issues. Truth and morality or what feels right to me. DA Carson has brought cases in this crisis of faith, truth and ultimately the Gospel.

---

### **Mike says**

Carson is very good at getting to the crux of the matter in regard to the 'new' tolerance, as he calls it, a tolerance that's in fact far less tolerant of anything it disagrees with than it claims. Well worth reading for understanding the climate we're in currently, where Christians in particular are being targeted as intolerant by those who won't brook any other viewpoint but their own.

---

### **J says**

I enjoy Carson's exegetical work and am a fan of the series he edits, especially NSBT. But there is less to like about his ventures into cultural criticism, which showcase to a less than desirable degree his 'Gospel Coalition' pedigree. Like *The Gagging of God*, this book comes off a bit paranoid (for instance in his Huntingtonian 'clash of civilizations' rhetoric about Islam), a bit culture war-ish, and a bit reductionist (what is 'postmodernism'? Carson writes confidently like it's a thing). The best part of this book is the critique of Volf's treatment of Islam on p. 118ff, where he takes Volf to task for eliding the incommensurable particularities of Christian and Muslim tradition. But on the whole, this is a pretty half (third?) baked treatment of the difficulties of 'tolerance' in liberal societies.

There is a helpful article describing Carson's theological methodology, including remarks about his epistemology, in *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology*, 29.1 (2011), 245-74.

---

### **Leandro Guimarães says**

Èere is ?omeþi? about Car?on's writi? ?tyle ðat irks me — perhaps he is a little it?y bit?y too didactical, wiþ quite a few references to former or furðer parts of the ?ame books, perhaps a lack of confidence in his articulation of ideas ðat makes he explain a bit too much.

But ðere is no complaini? about his ideas nor about his competence to defend ðem. His command of French enables him to ?ee what oðer anglophone writers do not — for in?tance, he handly deflates KA Smiþ and oðers' infatuation wiþ Postmoderni?m, even maki? critici?m of it ?uch as ðe Wil?ons' ?eem like kicki? dead dogs, as we ?ay in Brazil.

---

## An Te says

This is a thought-provoking book by D.A. Carson. His thesis begins with the definition of two forms of tolerance.

Firstly, the 'old tolerance' is exhibited when 'a person might be judged to be tolerant if while holding strong views, he or she insisted others had the right to dissent from those views and argue their own case.' (p.6). And secondly, the 'new tolerance', as defined by Thomas A. Helmbock, is 'that every individual's beliefs, values and lifestyle, and perception of truth claims are equal... There is no hierarchy of truth [as there is no such notion as 'Truth']. Your beliefs and my beliefs are equal, and all truth is relative.' Carson wittily notes that under the new tolerance, 'no absolutism is permitted, except for the absolute prohibition of absolutism.' (p.13) The new tolerance espouses a truth of its own. And such a belief, for those of the new tolerance, is not for discussion. This is the bottom line of this argument.

Carson draws on strong imagery through Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's poem, 'Nathan the Wise' in the 'Introduction' to draw the reader into the book. The poem is a resounding presentation of the ludicrous wishes when one comes to accept all 'versions of the world' to be true. A father has a magical ring. Endowing this upon his son's, he did not wish to leave his two son's without such a ring. So he casts two more rings indistinguishable from the original ring but for the feature that these new rings possess no magical powers. The father, satisfied with his ruse, confers these rings upon his son's telling each that they have received a magical ring. The father is content knowing that his sons think they each have received a ring imbued with magical power. It is a plea for religious tolerance.

Bona fide, I post a link to a descriptor of the 'Ring parable' from Wikipedia here.

The notion of truth must bear witness to falsity and there are some issues, when the *reductio ad absurdum* is applied, as is the case with this poem. You cannot help but see the silliness of one's moral and epistemological stance (of which we all have a stake in, whether or not one is explicit about this is another matter). There is a rule and rhyme why you are even reading this very review...

Carson begins with a litany of offences against Christianity in the modern world, as presented in the media, versus the treatment other faiths under the guise of the 'new tolerance.' Carson, I'll admit, is a little whiney in the section and, I feel, overplays the sympathy card with list of the occasions Christians have been slandered by 'new tolerance' adherents.

The chapter concerning the brief historical developments of tolerance is worthy of great note. His sweeping history of the key events commencing from the Roman empire and making stops with John Milton's *Areopagitica*, J.S. Mill's seminal book 'On Liberty' and John Locke's 'Letter concerning Toleration' with insights into the prevailing moral and epistemological moors of those times proffers valuable vistas of developments in the last four centuries. [He has wisely not considered the modern ideological and epistemological development of Truth and Evidence which would have needed a robust tour de force of Kant's transcendental idealism and Hegel's dialectical materialism. These are weighty matters as Hegel's outlook influenced a group with the sobriquet 'The Young Hegelians' of whom a certain Karl Marx, in the 1830's and 1840's, was an acolyte.] Carson has wisely chosen to not tackle these deeper roots but unearth some of the complaints the 'new tolerance' clearly raises. This is most overtly tied with the social, political and legal spheres. The material discussed is both vast and ambitious in its scope, but it is assuredly an insightful discussion, for there is much at stake, as it is, at heart, a prolegomenon of our societal malaise when truth, reason and, ultimately, love for one another are not included in our society's functional 'fabric'. It

is important to consider these cultural considerations as these 'invisible structures' shape how many perceive the world today. It may be a little skinny, for his logic is certainly not impregnable, however, I did not expect him to provide a water-tight account in such a short account but his pellucid reasoning and resourcefulness impels one to read more of his materials on this topic for a fuller (and enriching) response.

In chapter 4, Carson explodes the facade of the new tolerance. The new tolerance seems to impose a neutral and value-free framework. However, if anything, it is more wayward and inconsistent than the old tolerance for its 'more narrow' imposition of a cascade of structures of thought and judgements are made upon those who disagree with their way of working. What is particularly underhand from the new tolerance is that they consider their viewpoint to be superior to any other. For those who disagree with their viewpoint are simply considered 'intolerant.' Towards the beginning of chapter 5, Carson tersely summarises the two movements:

'the old tolerance is the willingness to put up with, allow or endure people and ideas with whom we disagree; in its purest form, the new tolerance is the social commitment to treat all ideas and people as equally right, save for those who disagree with this view of tolerance.' (p.98)

And what are the implications for those who disagree with this 'new tolerance'? Carson expands:

'Advocates of the new tolerance sacrifice wisdom and principle in support of just one supreme good: upholding their view of tolerance. So those who uphold and practice the older tolerance, enmeshed as they inevitably are in some value system, are written off as intolerant. Thus banished, they no longer deserve a place at the table.' (p.98)

Carson touches also on two conceptions of democracy which one can hold to. Firstly, there is the one which refers to an external authority which gives and executes power and justice. The other is that democracy is a value neutral process that can take care of itself. I feel Don argues convincingly that there is a need to invoke an external standard as the second option can result in the hijacking of the system by the self-interested agendas of those elected to rule (i.e. through the democratic process, one can gain full control over the press, media, legal system and the like, neglecting one's office to rule the people well, which lead to disastrous consequences and ultimately stymies the 'democratic' process making it a de facto democratic tyranny). The democratic process needs an external standard and referent to guide its process. As expected, no process, if guidance and deliberation are needed, is value-free. Man abhors a value-vacuum for he must come to worship 'something.'

In sum, this is a part philosophical and part-cultural appraisal of the prevailing attitude that 'all worldviews are equally true.' It is refreshing (and a great challenge) to read such a book. All worldviews are not equally valid as we are all called to be aware when Truth is being evacuated. In my mind, this is an important book for it convinces us to be wary of the underhand tactics of the new tolerance in slipping in their ways of working without warrant. It is slippery business but Carson seems to have a vice grip hold over his material and the playful arena of values. I feel comfortable he has explicated his position well. I commend you, Don Carson, on writing this book to help those who desire Truth in the muddled world. We are to stand on the solid ground of the Gospel, in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Guide me in your truth and teach me,  
for you are God my Savior,  
and my hope is in you all day long.  
Psalm 25:5 (NIV)

'Onwards and Upwards' - Some further Reading:

Carson, D.A., 2012. Christ and culture revisited. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing.  
Carson, D.A., 2002. The gagging of God: Christianity confronts pluralism. Zondervan.  
Bowman, J., 2007. Honor: A history. Encounter Books.

---

## **David says**

The issue of tolerance doesn't pop up much outside of theology. Of course we should be tolerant, right? Modern blanket tolerance (see Political Correctness) is particularly silly though. We're tolerant of absolutely everything apart from intolerance. Ah, I see the problem.

Perfect "tolerance" not being possible, Carson argues for the kind of respectful tolerance that informs debate, fuels constructive arguments, and changes minds. A tolerance that does not involve you swallowing your beliefs but promoting them and alwaysalwaysalways running the risk that the other guy makes more sense.

The Intolerance of Tolerance is written from an evangelical Christian perspective and dotted with bible verses, so if that doesn't gel with you - you know what, read it anyway. This is nothing less than an apologetic for personal belief, which I sure hope we all have and are not too precious to defend.

---

## **Brian Watson says**

This is an important book. Carson shows the two definitions of tolerance. The historical one says something like this: Truth exists regarding subject X. We may disagree about the truth of subject X. I will try to persuade you that you are wrong and you will try to persuade me that I am wrong. But we both agree not to use force or manipulation.

The second and current definition of tolerance says the only thing that is intolerant is an absolute truth claim. Of course, this is self-refuting, since it amounts an absolute truth claim.

There is a lot of wisdom in this book. Besides the changing definition of intolerance, I found this to be an important take-away: today, there is an assumption that a secular worldview is neutral, and religious views are extreme and should remain outside the public square. There is an increasing marginalization of traditional religious views (particularly orthodox Christianity). This trend goes against the first amendment and is, ironically, quite intolerant.

---

## **Eric Miller says**

Carson lends a scholarly ethos to a complaint that conservative Christians have been making for a long time. But his is a pretty weak and almost entirely anecdotal argument. It may describe a sort of awkward transition period in which institutions try to make the shift from Christian hegemony to pluralism, but there is simply no sinister "new tolerance" at work here. The suggestion that universities and secular intellectuals assign equal truth value to all claims is simply divorced from reality.

Check this out: Carson is wrong.

---

## **Lois says**

This was the kind of book I had to mull over every few pages. It isn't a long book, but it is thought-provoking. D.A. Carson writes about the changes in meaning of the word tolerance from the "old" definition to the "new." He confirmed what many of us think, that today's tolerance is a one-way street. People can have different opinions that used to generate discussion in the public arena. Now, people are expected to embrace everyone's opinion, unless of course, the opinion belongs to that of a conservative evangelical Christian. The person who expresses outrage at what he considers to be a moral issue, is ostracized and declared "intolerant" by those who are more "enlightened."

The book bogs down a bit when Carson is explaining the history of the early church and how that formed the "old" tolerance, resulting from the martyrdom of first century Christians, but other than that, his modern day examples were vivid.

---

## **Dave Jenkins says**

The Intolerance of Tolerance by D.A. Carson is a masterful exploration into one of the greatest cultural issues of our day--- tolerance by one of the greatest Christian minds of our day. In post-modernism, tolerance—the affirming and celebrating of virtually any exercise of personal autonomy- is the prime value. The unforgiveable sin is being judgmental, that is, believing that an activity or lifestyle choice that does not hurt another person is wrong, immoral or sinful. A second related unforgiveable sin is claiming that what you believe is objectively true and thus binding on another person. A person who holds these beliefs is considered to be bigoted, narrow-minded, and arrogant, just as was true in Ancient Rome.

In our twenty-first century culture, Christians are to be “wise as serpents and innocent as doves” (Matt. 10:16). The Church has been charged with proclaiming the unchanging unadulterated truth of God’s Word to an adulterous, materialistic culture that lifts up itself in rebellion against the God who created them.

Debates about Christianity have shifted from whether it’s true to was anyone offended. The Gospel is offensive but the gospel messenger must be loving. The new tolerance which Dr. Carson rightly exposes in this book will help Christians to understand what this new tolerance is and why it insists that no one should hold firm convictions.

The Intolerance of Tolerance contains eight chapters where Dr. Carson lays out the changing face of tolerance, explains how we came to be where we are, gives a history of tolerance, exposes its inconsistency, how the Church has responded to the new tolerance, along with tolerance, democracy and majoritarianism and concludes by providing ten ways forward towards a biblical view of tolerance. Throughout the book as is typical with Dr. Carson’s other books, he provides penetrating biblical-theological analysis along with keen cultural observation and practical implications for how the issue attacks Christianity.

The heart of the book is about the notion of tolerance which is changing, and with it new definitions that



shape tolerance.

Carson argues that, “Although a few things can be said in favor of the newer definition, the sad reality is that this new, contemporary tolerance is intrinsically intolerant. It is blind to its own shortcomings because it erroneously thinks it holds the moral high ground; it cannot be questioned because it has become part of the West’s plausibility structure. Worse, this new tolerance is socially dangerous and is certainly intellectually debilitating. Even the good that it wishes to achieve is better accomplished in other ways” (2). The shift “from accepting the existing of different views” to “acceptance of different views,” from recognizing other people’s right to have different beliefs or practices to accepting the differing views of other people is subtle in form but massive in substance. The accept that a different or opposing position exists and deserves the right to exist is one thing; to accept the position itself means that one is no longer opposing it. The new tolerance suggests that actual accepting another’s position means believing that position to be true, or at least as true as your own” (3).

Understanding this issue is important because when people think of tolerance they think of the older definition of tolerance and not the new definition of tolerance. Thinking clearly is important as Christians are to be people of the Book and to study to show themselves as workman who do not need to be ashamed (2nd Timothy 2:15).

Carson notes that the older view of tolerance “held either that true is objective and can be known, and that the best way to uncover it is bold tolerance of those who disagree, since sooner or later the truth will win out; or that while truth can be known in some domains, it probably cannot be known in other domains, and that the wisest and least malignant course in such cases is benign tolerance grounded in superior knowledge that recognizes our limitations. By contrast, the new tolerance argues that there is no one view that is exclusively true. Strong opinions are nothing more than strong preferences for a particular version of reality, each version equally true” (11).

Beginning with this new view of tolerance elevates one’s view to the supreme position in the hierarchy of moral virtues, the supreme sin is intolerance. “The trouble is that such intolerance like the new tolerance also takes on a new definition. Intolerance is no longer a refusal to allow contrary opinions to say their piece in public, but must be understood to be any questioning or contradicting the view that all opinions are equal in nature, that all worldviews have equal worth that all stances are equally valid. To question such postmodern axioms is by definition intolerant. For such questioning there is no tolerance whatsoever, for it is classes as intolerance and must therefore be condemned. It has become the supreme vice” (12).

The implications for the old and new tolerance are huge and need to be considered by every Christian whether they are preaching from the pulpit or working in a cubicle. Consider a Christian who offers a well-thought out exposition of who Jesus is and what he has done, including how his cross and resurrection constitute the only way by which human beings can be reconciled to God, the person who holds the defeater belief may listen with some intellectual interest but readily dismiss everything you say without much thought. The scope of this problem then comes into focus. “The new tolerance tends to avoid serious engagement over difficult moral issues, analyzing almost every issue on the one axis tolerant/intolerant, excluding all others from the pantheon of the virtuous who do not align with this axis” (15).

Dr. Carson concludes this book by giving ten words about how to engage the new tolerance. First, "expose, the new tolerance’s moral and epistemological bankruptcy, 2) persevere a place for truth, 3) expose the new tolerance’s condescending arrogance, 4) insist that the new tolerance is not progress, 5) distinguish between empirical diversity and the inherit goodness of all diversity, 6) challenge secularism’s ostensible neutrality and superiority, 7) practice and encourage civility, 8) evangelize, 9) be prepared to suffer, and finally, delight

in and trust in God” (161-176).

The problem with tolerance is that it is not tolerant at all. Tolerance promises much, but at end of the day is another false gospel the world proclaims in order to distract men and women from the Gospel. As Paul did with the false teachers at Corinthians, so Christians must today do, which is to not preach their opinions nor accommodate false teaching, but to proclaim that the Gospel is the power of God unto the salvation of mankind. The Gospel shines the light of the “knowledge of the glory of God” (2 Cor. 4:5) upon sinners who need to see their sin for what it is, and come to Jesus in repentance and faith. The Gospel is not an opinion or a fairytale, but the power of God to transfer those from the kingdom of darkness to the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The “gospel” of tolerance is another lie designed to lead the people of God away from God. Tolerance promotes a low view of God and a high view of man. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is supreme over the “gospel” of tolerance, because the Gospel carries with it the power of God to open sinner’s eyes to the Truth about who God is, who Jesus is, and what He has done in His death, burial and resurrection. The “gospel” of tolerance proclaims a false view of God by teaching people to turn to themselves which taken to its conclusion will not result in happiness, but rather in eternal unending, unrelenting separation from God in hell. The byproduct of believing pluralism and tolerance is that people have no fear of God, which means they do not believe that Jesus will come to judge the living and the dead.

The gospel of tolerance and pluralism is destroying generation after generation, but the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the power of God to open people’s eyes to the Truth about who Jesus is and what He has done in His death, burial and resurrection. The Gospel is superior in every way to the inferior gospel of tolerance and pluralism, because the Gospel alone contains the power of God to accomplish all that it aims to do, which is to effect the salvation of the lost and gather and scatter the people of God to bear witness to Jesus Christ the Chief Shepherd of His People.

In my opinion, *The Intolerance of Tolerance* will make an extremely useful textbook for any Christian interested in the origins of how tolerance has come into being, and how it continues to affect our lives as Christians. First, Carson frames the issue by giving the background of what old and new tolerance is while introducing the reader to others who have thought seriously about the issue of tolerance. In addition to this fact, the book is footnoted so the reader can explore additional perspectives from others on this issue. Second, as is typical with Carson, the book is very well-written which will help the reader digest the very heavy content in the book. Finally reading *The Intolerance of Tolerance* will help Christians to understand that the new tolerance is socially dangerous and intellectually debilitating but also that it leads to genuine intolerance of all who struggle to hold fast to their beliefs. *The Intolerance of Tolerance* is a must own book on a very serious issue that is threatening not only Western civilization but the whole world, and will help Christians and the Church to remain steadfast in the Word of God and proclaim the Gospel to a lost and dying world.

Title: *The Intolerance of Tolerance*

Author: D.A. Carson

Publisher: Eerdmans (2012)

Disclosure of Material Connection: I received this book free from the publisher through the Eerdmans’ book review bloggers program. I was not required to write a positive review. The opinions I have expressed are my own. I am disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission’s 16 CFR, Part 255 :

**Pastor2112 says**

Carson argues that "contemporary tolerance is intrinsically intolerant" and that it is blind to this irony because "it erroneously thinks it holds the moral high ground." He laments the shift of tolerance from its older meaning of "accepting the existence of different views" to a newer view of tolerance as meaning "the acceptance of different views". The "older tolerance" assumed that objective truth existed, that it's our duty to pursue it, and that reasonable people can uncover the truth, not through coercion, but through an exchange of ideas. The "new tolerance" argues that all truth claims are equally right and that it is impossible to distinguish the right from the wrong. The "new tolerance" in its rejection of dogmatism and absolutism is, strangely enough, itself dogmatic and absolute! Tolerance cannot be the new dogmatic absolute because there are things that simply cannot be tolerated - genocide, rape, pedophilia, racism, etc. G. K. Chesterton was right, "The purpose of an open mind is the same as that of an open mouth - to close it again on something solid."

---