

Please! As Followers of Jesus, We Can Do Better

In the aftermath of the Charlottesville tragedy, what grieves me most is that so much of the church sounds just like the world.

We sound just as divided, just as politicized, just as biased. Rather than taking the higher ground and calling others to join us, we sink down into the fray, getting soiled and dirtied in the process. Rather than being a voice of sanity and clarity to the nation, our message is muddled. We are more rude than redemptive and more caustic than compassionate. Surely we can and must do better.

It's one thing to have biblically-based convictions. It's another thing to be a slave to culturally-colored opinions.

It's one thing to be passionate for justice and truth. It's another to be so right in our own eyes.

How many of us do our best to understand both sides of an argument? How many of us make an effort to listen and understand before we speak? How many of us expose ourselves to viewpoints that we differ with? How many of us put caring before criticizing? How many of us realize that we all have blind spots that hinder our objectivity? How many of us even take time to pray and ask God for His wisdom and His perspective?

Do you remember when the Sean Hannity Show was actually Hannity and Colmes (speaking of the late Alan Colmes)? The few times I tuned in, I would hear Hannity present his position and think to myself, "Well done. He nailed it." Then Colmes would respond and I'd say, "You've got a great point there."

Often things are not so black and white, and often, there is

truth and error on both sides. But if we completely shut out opposing views, if we refuse even to hear what others have to say, how can we be so sure we're being objective?

I'm an unashamed, unapologetic, moral conservative, and I would gladly die on the hill of my core biblical convictions. At the same time, I can tell you what my ideological opponents believe and why they believe it. And I can present their arguments in such a way that they would say, "You understand our position." Yes, I understand it, and I reject it.

But all too often, when I'm interacting with someone I differ with, my focus is not to understand their position before responding. My focus is to rebut them, to prove they're wrong, to demonstrate I'm right. And that begs the question: Am I trying to win an argument or am I trying to be redemptive? Am I trying to be right or trying to help someone see the truth? And am I even open to being wrong on any position I hold?

To be candid, though, our lack of ability to have constructive interaction is not my biggest concern. Rather, it is that I see racism in the body, I see politically-driven factionalism in the body, I see lack of love; even worse, I see cruelty. And so much of it is done in the name of Jesus. What a reproach.

Over the weekend, we posted a meme on Facebook that we've used before, picturing two adorable toddlers, one white and one black, with the white boy's arms around the black boy. The caption reads: "There's only one race: the human race."

To my shock, when I looked at some comments later in the day, there was a long thread started by one white believer who claimed that the real crisis was white genocide caused by intermarriage. Another long thread was started by a white believer pointing out that it was the white toddler embracing the black toddler, since blacks refuse to embrace whites because of past hurts in America. I deleted both threads in

their entirety, making plain that trash like this had no place on our Facebook page.

But the sword cuts both ways. Some black believers have fully embraced the radical-left narrative that most Trump supporters (including white evangelicals) are white supremacists. As for Trump himself, a very polite, God-fearing black believer called my radio show this week and told me he felt was Trump was a racist. When I asked him why he believed that, some of his reasons included: 1. Trump is intentionally trying to take health care away from black and Hispanic children; and 2. Trump is trying to overturn everything Obama did simply because of race.

It's one thing to dislike the president and say he's divisive. It's one thing even to believe he's a racist of sorts. It's another thing to believe he opposes Obama policies because Obama was black or that he wants to steal health care from black children. That is a bigoted, unfounded position.

I understand that people have their viewpoints. But to me, when we can be this racially divided in our perspectives—as professing followers of Jesus, at that—it's clear we are not hearing each other clearly, not weighing the evidence objectively and perhaps not even willing to consider that we might be wrong on any level. Beware the danger of living in a bigoted echo chamber!

And who can even begin to describe the cruelty of many of our posts—the mockery of our comments, the disparaging tone of our tweets, the ugly nature of our communication? If we spoke and wrote based on biblical principles, for some of us, that would reduce our words by about 90 percent and change the content and tone of the 10 percent that was left.

What if we lived by this verse alone? “Let no unwholesome word proceed out of your mouth, but only that which is good for building up, that it may give grace to the listeners” (Eph.

4:29).

Or how about this one? "Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you should answer everyone" (Col 4:6).

Or how about this? "Therefore, my beloved brothers, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger, for the anger of man does not work the righteousness of God" (James 1:19-20).

And how about seeking to practice "love your neighbor as yourself"?

For the sake of a watching world, we can and must do better. As we so often hear, you and I are the only Jesus some will ever see.

Today, as the world watches us, His followers, what does it think of Him?