

VIEW

"THE COMMANDMENT OF THE LORD IS PURE,
ENLIGHTENING THE EYES." PSALM 19:8

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Unity begins with Love

Rodney King — the drunken driver arrested and beaten by LAPD officers in 1991 — asked a seemingly benign question many years ago: "Can't we all get along?"

Many of us have ridiculed his statement because it was both naive and silly. After the policemen were acquitted, Los Angeles erupted in rioting and looting, which resulted in the injury of many who had nothing to do with the Rodney King case. All of this was recorded on national TV for all to see. Many of us will never forget witnessing a new form of window shopping: young men broke out the glass of the shop window and extracted TV's and stereos and whatever else they could grab, and ran off, unmolested.

We'll also never forget the poor guy who happened to drive his truck down one of the streets where the riots were heating up. Again, before our eyes, this man — who had nothing to do with Rodney King or the LAPD — was dragged from his truck and pummeled by several thugs.

So, who was supposed to get along with whom? The store-keepers whose wares were being stolen? Or the young white man pulled from his truck and beat up, apparently in retaliation for the beating of King? Or citizens who feel that drunken driving through the streets puts innocent lives in danger?

"LET'S FACE IT: SOME OF OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS DO THINGS THAT MAKE YOU SCRATCH YOUR HEAD...OR THEY JUST IRRITATE YOU OR ANNOY YOU OR FRUSTRATE YOU."

Even from the most innocent lips, "can't we all get along?" sounds a bit wide-eyed and unsophisticated. In the world, we can never expect to all "get along." Jesus says, "In the world, you will have tribulation..." (John 16:33) — that's a reality we all face.

But there is a place where these words should not only be respected, but treasured. There is a sphere in which "can't we all get along?" makes sense. In fact, they are words that form the rule for our behavior.

That place, of course, is the family of God, the church, the body of Christ. In the church,

"can't we all get along?" is a question that must be answered: "we can, and we do."

Jesus told his disciples that the world would know that they were disciples by how they treated each other (John 13:34-35). Love is the identifying characteristic of believers in Christ. John tells us that if we

don't love our brother, who we can see, how can we say we love God, whom we can't see? (1 Jn. 4:20).

This love is manifested in several ways. First, it is shown in our willingness to help others in times of difficulty. See 1 Jn. 3:16-18. "I'll die for you!" sounds hollow when we are unwilling to part with a few of our goods (or some of our time) to help a brother.

Perhaps the most difficult application of this, though, is in practicing forbearance toward our brethren. Let's face it: some of our brothers and sisters do things that make you scratch your head. Or they say things that make you wonder what they were thinking. Or they just irritate you or annoy you or frustrate you.

What are you going to do? Begin judging their motives? But no man knows another man's heart. Maybe you can share your frustration, irritation, etc. with others. That'll make you feel better, right? Maybe, but it's wrong. The Bible calls slander "evil" and says that those who practice it will not enter the kingdom of God (I Cor. 6:10). Paul put those who slander others in the same category as those without love, who are unforgiving and brutal (II Tim. 3:3).

People who love their brethren do not say bad things about them. We may not agree with someone's decisions or care for his personality. But that doesn't give us permission to speak ill of him.

That's the game of the immature and the insecure, people who need to make others low so they can feel superior. It's a dirty game, a sinful game and one that causes schisms in the body, even if not readily apparent.

The solution is not to "watch your tongue" but to examine your heart, to make certain that your love for your brethren is "unfeigned" (I Peter 1:22). That doesn't necessarily mean all your words to him will be sugar-coated — that may not be love at all; just the opposite. But all of your words and actions in reference to that person will be for one purpose: to nurture his or her spiritual growth and development.

DP

Fellowship Question

If this arrangement appears Scriptural to you, please write Scriptures authorizing it below (hint: you won't find any). What is the "fellowship" issue here? What NT principle is violated by this arrangement?

