

This is the article I read partially on Sunday --

There is plenty of foolishness and evil on all sides of brawls and that is true of the Charlottesville riot. All claims of racial superiority are an affront to the Creator who ordained their existence. The white supremacy crowd was wrong in their claims and actions and caused this sad event when they went from dissent to mob violence against the citizens of Charlottesville. They should be arrested and prosecuted. In the same way anyone who, on their own initiative vandalizes public property are in violation of the law and should be prosecuted.

I see events in theological perspective which always involves the categories of sin and redemption. Evil does not begin with actions but with the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. It begins with a hunger which becomes a desire, a demand and then a crime. Sin is not always just taking part in a terrible thing but is more often turning a good thing into an ultimate thing. God is the ultimate thing. We are created in his image to live for his glory. Whatever becomes competition in our hearts for his glory is sin. Sin/evil begins with a heart belief and results in behavior.

The below the surface stuff – which is what I deal with when I teach and preach on such things – is not overly complicated. People so easily get their identity wrapped up in “winning” something. This because they have lost sight of where identity (the Bible calls it “righteousness”) comes from. If God is our identity/righteousness then we can trust him and do not have to go outside of his provision and commands. When we don’t get what we want we are disappointed but not destroyed or lost. If something – anything -- other than God is our identity such as a job, a house, our bank account, a cause or the success of an athletic team and if we lose that thing we do not just lose that thing we lose our selves. In Charlottesville – and often elsewhere – people decided that their *selves*/identity was on the line and so they are willing to kill.

Wanting to right past racial offenses is a good thing but can never be an ultimate thing. The mob who eventually instigated the trouble may have started with a legitimate point in there somewhere with the desire to have their rights respected. But seeking one’s rights, while a good thing, can never be an ultimate thing. God is that which is ultimate.

Here is how it works. “I want to be respected and to see my heritage respected” becomes “I demand that my heritage be respected” and then a line in the heart has been crossed. I have ceased being concerned for God and his glory and have become my own god. That leads to “I will have my heritage respected and I will destroy anyone who gets in my way” and the riot is on. We go from a desire to a fear over our desire being at risk and then we demand and then strike out at someone.

All advocates of racial supremacy have decided they need their superiority to be affirmed, guarded and advanced. Since they start with a lie to begin with they are already far along toward serious problems. There is no way their demands can be satisfied except through of injustice and violence.

Another example is the *black lives matter* movement which began with a legitimate point – their rights have been compromised for a long time. Equal protection under law should be afforded to all and often that has not happened. But they have taken a good thing – their rights as citizens – and it has been stirred up into an ultimate thing. “I demand and will have justice on my terms.” They then lose an opportunity to be for something big and grand, for real justice and the truth that all men are made in God’s image. Also they give away their true standing in God by saying “I will allow you to define me. I am only who you allow me to be so I will strike out at you until you affirm me. I cannot bear the sight of this symbol, it robs me of my righteousness.” It is poor and goes away from God rather than toward him. And often violence follows.

For all concerned – the gospel of Jesus Christ is the only thing that can bring redemption to this. That gospel is the news of forgiveness of sins, reconciliation to God and a new heart toward my neighbor – of all races. In the gospel we can be reconciled to the Creator who is the real source of our identity and righteousness. Now we have something that can never be lost or taken away. When people call us names, bring offense to us, insult that which is dear to us – it may sting but it does not take away what is our true of us as created and redeemed by God. So we can turn the other cheek – when we are insulted we can choose not to insult in return. We have the power for real bridge building and to be a blessing. Only the gospel of a crucified and risen Savior gives this power. When we are made alive by him, given true identity in him, have our lives bound up in him and his kingdom – then we are ready to go to Charlottesville because we finally have something to say.

-- Pastor William Douglas, 2017