

DR. SETZER'S STATEMENT ABOUT CHARLOTTESVILLE

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

With you, I am heartsick about the outbreak of racial hatred and violence last Saturday in Charlottesville. It grieves my heart to see such an ugly spectacle of evil proudly paraded in the streets of a great American city.

Bambi and I have been in Playa del Carmen, Mexico this week, celebrating our 40th-anniversary. However, I did not want my absence to silence my response to the tragic events last Saturday. To state the obvious, those events deserve our unequivocal condemnation. This is no time for ambiguity about “two sides,” moral waffling, or political posturing. This is the time for anybody with a voice, a true American spirit, and an ounce of Christian conviction to denounce white supremacist ideology, rhetoric, and actions (including in this instance, murder) in the strongest possible terms. And with passion and conviction, I do!

If, as Romans 8:28 promises, our God is able to wrest good, even from this grave evil, perhaps that good is this. For the first time in a long time, the country at large--red, blue, and purple--seems to have come to a point of absolute moral clarity: Racial bigotry and hatred, especially that masquerading as “patriotism,” will not be tolerated. Despising someone, let alone attacking and attempting to destroy them on the basis of their race, creed, sexual orientation, or other evidence of “difference,” is not just regrettable. It is profoundly Un-American, categorically wrong, and is reprehensible to the Creator who endowed us with those “inalienable rights” our nation holds in trust.

Further, this sort of moral conviction and courage should be even more compelling for the church. According to the stirring manifesto of Galatians 3:28, the church is the place where historic and deeply embedded divisions of race and racial injustice (“slave and free”), gender discrimination (“male and female”) and religious bigotry (“Jew and Gentile”) are dissolved by the Kingdom of God breaking into our world in Jesus Christ.

Thankfully, we belong to a church that aspires to a Galatians 3:28 brand of liberating love. We are a beachhead of that Kingdom where “Grace Abounds” for *all* God’s children, even those, especially those, who have forgotten that is who they are. I cannot fathom what deep wound, despair, or crisis of meaning motivates angry, young men to take up the chant and tactics of Nazi ideology. But I know that the Good News of Jesus is God’s answer for them, as surely as it is for us. Hence, never has the need been more profound for a church like Knollwood where God’s welcome to refugees, immigrants, people of color, those perceived as different from ourselves, and yes, our enemies too, is non-negotiable.

Sunday, August 27, is “Welcome Back, Sunday” at Knollwood. Originally conceived as a time for our congregation to regather and regroup after our many summer absences, this day now takes on a new and deeper meaning. For we are Jesus’ people, called to welcome *all* as God in Christ has welcomed *us* (Romans 15:7). And this is a time, like few others, where it is vitally important to make clear where we stand on that Welcome as disciples of the crucified and risen One. As the

Apostle states the moral imperative of this and every hour of crisis, “If the bugle gives an indistinct sound, who will get ready for battle?” (1 Cor. 14:8).

Even so, in the midst of a national calamity, let our congregation covenant anew to bear faithful witness to Jesus Christ, in whose name and Spirit rests not only our hope, but the hope of the world.

Blessings,

Bob Setzer, Jr.