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Gleanings

Why?



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According to one source, there were eighteen mass murders in the USA in 2012. The venues for these atrocities included spas, high schools, universities, a funeral home, a café, a movie theatre, a Sikh temple, a meat packing plant, a shopping mall, and an elementary school. (<http://www.businessinsider.com/mass-murders-in-2012-2012-12>)

In all these horrific events, the lingering question is why? Why did people, sometimes children and other helpless people, have to die?

Those who do not embrace a biblical worldview have no answers. For those who do embrace a biblical worldview, the Scriptures provide guidance as to how to understand these horrendous events.

To understand the biblical view, one must begin with the nature of man and ask the question: Is man fundamentally good or evil? Genesis 3 records the fall of man, that is, man's initial rebellion against God. Adam and Eve disobeyed a direct command from God and, as a result, they died spiritually, and eventually they died physically. Because of the nature of the universe, reproduction happens in all species according to their own kind (Genesis 1). Therefore once the first humans disobeyed God, their nature changed. This changed nature was then passed on to their heirs. Theologians call man's condition after the sin of Adam and Eve depraved or fallen.

In the first three chapters of the book of Romans, the apostle Paul argues that all human beings are born into a state of sin or depravity, that is, rebellion against God. Therefore, by nature people do not obey God. Consequently every human being has a bias to sin. This means that by nature humans are evil, which begs the question, if the base nature of humans is evil, why weren't there more mass murders and other crimes in 2012? In other words, why aren't humans as bad as they could be?

Notwithstanding the horrific acts of murder noted above, generally people can live relatively safely. One of God's loving, kind provisions for his creatures is that he grants to all the ability to obey some of his principles. For example, even fools can use their tongues correctly (Proverbs 17:28) and the most decadent person can be nice (Matthew 5:46). Theologians call this common grace.

Common grace is the gift of God granted to every human being so that—on at least rudimentary level—humans can obey God's rules for his creation. This grace is called "common" because it is widely granted to people and therefore not unusual. Even those who do not accept Christ can live in a measure of common grace.

The reason common grace is so important is that the only way to accomplish anything in God's universe is to obey his laws. Common grace provides a means by which all people can obey enough of God's laws to survive, at least for a while. Therefore common grace is the explanation for how rebellious people can function and even seem to prosper in God's universe.

Common grace, however, can never provide the basis for fallen man to be reconciled to the righteous holy Creator of the universe; only the grace of Christ can do this.

In addition, common grace only goes so far with people who do not accept Christ. Eventually these people will experience a breakdown with common grace.

Recently, I wrote a Business Tip titled "The Limit of Common Grace," in which I note that there appears to be a limit to common grace (<http://www.strategieswork.com/publications/BusinessTips/2012/2012-09.htm>). One of the texts of Scripture that reveals this truth is Hosea 14:9 (NIV):



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"The ways of the LORD are right; the righteous walk in them, but the rebellious stumble in them."

Rebellious people have the grace to obey some of God's rules only so far—at some point the grace runs out. And man, in his base nature without common grace, can only produce dysfunctionality, destruction, and death. The atrocities of the past year are examples of expended common grace.

In each of these atrocities there has been or will be a search for the causes. Why did these tragic events take place? There will be calls for gun control, which only addresses symptoms. Guns are not the problem; the problem is the people who wrongly use the guns. At best, gun control will provide some sin management, which may provide some benefits but doesn't really solve the problem.

Others may recognize that gun control will not really solve the problem. They may rightly recognize that the problem is people. In their analyses, they may postulate that the common factor in all the atrocities is that they were conducted by social misfits. To prevent future tragedies, therefore, government must control the social misfits. But trying to identify and control people can be very problematic and doesn't really address the root issues. This conclusion could open Pandora's Box and give the authorities sweeping powers to violate individual privacy rights.

Neither controlling guns nor controlling people will provide the real solution. So what is the solution?

The real solution to the problem must begin with a sound understanding of human depravity. By nature humans are born with a bias to sin and therefore are in a state of rebellion against their Creator. The only way to remedy this situation is by changing man's nature.

Though man can make minor behaviour modifications, man cannot change his essential nature except through Christ. Jesus Christ came to do for man what man could not do himself. Christ came to pay the penalty for sin that is required by a just and holy God. The work of Christ is then imputed to those who accept him as their personal Saviour and Lord. This is what effects change in the hearts of people.

A person who knows Christ becomes a new creature; that man or woman has a new heart and a new nature. In contrast to the base traits of man—dysfunctionality, destruction, and death—the new nature of man is characterized by functionality, progress, and life.

How can what we do as people, communities, and nations effect this change? We need to humble ourselves, seek the Lord, and turn from our wicked ways and then the Lord will heal us (2 Chronicles 7:14). People who are transformed by the power of Jesus Christ don't commit atrocities. They facilitate life, progress, and efficiency. They live according to a biblical worldview and bring glory to God.

When common grace is expended in sinful human beings there is no restraint on sin; the full impact of depravity becomes clear in atrocities such as mass murders. This is the biblical answer to the question of why.

And what is the solution? As noted above, it is not gun control nor is it people control. The only efficacious solution is spiritual transformation that changes the hearts and minds of people to bring them into alignment with the will and ways of God. This is the only way to produce meaningful change in the hearts of people to enable them to live holy and godly lives.

The greatest good that can come from the horrific events noted above is for people to repent and turn to Christ as the only real solution. May God grant us the grace to repent and the power for transformation through Jesus Christ so that our lives are characterized by functionality, progress, and life.

Happy New Year!

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