

Trayvon Martin and the Power of Groupthink

In the Trayvon Martin case—the horrendous instance of a 17-year-old being shot in a tussle—caused emotional triggers for black Americans who remember years of lynchings, segregation and injustice. To further exacerbate matters, the present experience of people of color today in America is still unpleasant in regard to being profiled by people in law enforcement—it is unpleasant even for those who think it may be necessary—of which Zimmerman was a part despite the fact that he was merely a civilian patrol person.

All this history, combined with the initial response of the media virtually convicting Zimmerman before he had a fair hearing, ensured that people of color would be outraged if Zimmerman was found not guilty, irrespective of what kind of detail would come out in the trial. This is simply because Trayvon already became larger than life, bigger than this particular trial, when he became a post-mortem symbol of racial injustice.

Since symbols and metaphors connect to the deepest part of our emotions, reactions to said symbols are not always based on logic and fact.

Consequently, when horrific tragedies take place similar to what happened with Trayvon Martin, a few leaders—whether in media, sports, entertainment or community activism—who influence their people have the ability either to emotionally incite masses of people or create an opportunity for peaceful dialogue. To disagree would be unthinkable if you are part of this segment of the population because you would be deemed a traitor to your own people. Hence, I believe approximately 25-40 percent of the people incited may not even know or care about the details of the case. They are just identifying with their people and embracing group anger and outrage.

In reality, all of us have “drunk the Kool-Aid” of groupthink,

whether we are white, black, yellow or red. This is simply because all of us have psychologically developed in certain ethnic, economic and cultural contexts that are impossible to escape. Trying to objectively separate yourself from a historic environment that has programmed your thinking is like standing inside a bucket and trying to lift yourself up. It is impossible—even for the most self-aware in the human race.

Thus, if you are Hispanic, there is some level of groupthink that will influence your view on a hot topic such as immigration. If you are a conservative white person, you will have your triggers connected to gun control and big government programs. You get the picture. This is why public-opinion polls related to the ethos of our nation are not to be trusted if they are only sampling one demographic group or culture.

Groupthink is both good and bad. It is good because we all need the support of our communities and should try to stick together, even in times when we don't agree. However, It is also dangerous because sometimes groupthink causes good people to do horrible things to individuals and other people groups. For instance, during the Holocaust, many Germans cooperated with Hitler in exterminating the Jews. During the early 19th century, many Christians in the South justified slavery. And during our own day, many people support the genocide of their own people with their pro-abortion position.

Groupthink also gains more power over an individual the more ignorant and purposeless they are, since they are vulnerable to any cause that will give them a reason to live—whether it is right or wrong.

What should we do to avoid the errors of groupthink, then? Even though it is virtually impossible in the natural to escape the assumptions of our culture and groupthink, that doesn't mean we should just go with the flow.

First, we need to allow the supernatural Word of God to wash our minds. Romans 12:1-2 teaches us that the Word of God can literally transform our minds so we can think God's thoughts after Him. This is important because God is the only truly

objective being in the universe who is not influenced morally by any circumstance or person.

Second, we should attempt as much as possible to logically detach ourselves from our emotions, political parties and ethnicities, and analyze each situation by carefully reviewing all the facts presented. After reviewing all the facts, we need to pray and ask the Holy Spirit to guide us into the truth based on the principles of the Word of God.

Third, we should always have the guts and courage to stand up and speak the truth—even if it is against the majority of the voices that surround us. This is the prophetic call each believer has as the salt and light of the world.

Last, we should get the honest opinion of other respectable and intelligent people who have a different perspective and culture than ourselves. In doing so, we will make our decisions after understanding both sides of the issue along with the emotional triggers connected to both.

In regard to the Trayvon Martin case, black, white and Hispanic leaders in the church should pray for our nation and use this as an opportunity to have meaningful dialogue and see God bring healing to our cities and nation. The prophetic voice of a biblical church needs to drown out the voices of self-seeking leaders using this tragedy for a platform and their own self-aggrandizement.

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