

## The Real Robert E. Lee

**Reviling a Man of Noble Character**

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**Given 02-Sep-17; Sermon #1395c**

The violence that erupted in Charlottesville, Virginia, three weeks ago centered on a statue in a park. That statue is an equestrian monument of Confederate General Robert E. Lee. Charlottesville's City Council voted (3-2) to remove the statue. As of yesterday, that decision has been left in the hands of a judge. I am sure that whether it goes one way or the other, it will go further up the line.

As the controversy spread, Leftists of various stripes have widened their hateful search to destroy or move just about every publicly displayed Confederate statue, bust, or monument in the country. I found out in doing a little research that, as of last year, there are said to be 1,503 Confederate symbols displayed in public spaces around the country.

Just to be clear—so all of you know, and to put this in the proper perspective—the Civil War ended 152 years ago.

Matters have become insane. Today, ESPN is broadcasting the college football game between Virginia and William & Mary, which will take place in Charlottesville. Ironically, an up-and-coming play-by-play announcer named Robert Lee. Mr. Lee is of Asian descent, but that does not seem to matter any more. He was scheduled to call the game today in Charlottesville, but ESPN and Lee mutually agreed (and I just wonder how "mutual" that was) that, *because of his name*—simply because it is similar to Robert E. Lee—he should be moved to a different game in a different city to avoid any unwanted attention.

So now just having the name Robert Lee is somehow racist. It is ridiculous. Doesn't anybody realize that three-quarters of the male children in the South are named "Robert Lee"? I am being facetious, but through the South, that is a name of honor and people have named their children that or used the middle name "Lee" to honor this man.

Fair question: Who was Robert E. Lee? Does he deserve the opprobrium that he has been receiving over the last few weeks? Did the Leftists even check their history books to see what kind of a man he was?—if he is worthy of the kind of reviling he is receiving? This has gone way beyond reason or common sense, and I fear that it may have repercussions a little later on for the church. I don't know that. But it could because of the mindset of these people.

Robert E. Lee was a son of the famous Lees of Virginia. They were one of the first families of that state. His father was Revolutionary General Henry “Light Horse Harry” Lee, one of Washington's better generals. His cousin was Richard Henry Lee, a delegate to the Continental Congress. He actually was the one who stood up first and said Virginia wants independence. He married the granddaughter of Martha Washington. The Lees were a patriotic family. They were really big in early America.

Lee had an exemplary and storied military career in the United States Army from 1829 (when he graduated second in his class from West Point with four years of no demerits; he was already as a kid a very noble man of high character) to 1861 when he resigned his commission to defend the state of Virginia.

As the Civil War approached (this is something most people don't know), Robert E. Lee was a Unionist. He put down John Brown's rebellion at Harper's Ferry. He was the one they dispatched from Washington to put it down. It lasted three minutes, and John Brown was captured.

He was also on hand when Texas seceded from the Union, but he did not participate. As a matter of fact, he went back to Washington, where Abraham Lincoln made him a full Colonel. When the war started, Lincoln, seeing this man who seemed to be an up-and-coming officer and knowing his character, offered him the rank of Major General in the Union Army to command the defense of Washington, D.C. He struggled over the promise of an appointment, but Lee could not bring himself to fight against his home state of Virginia, so he resigned from the U.S. Army and took up command of the Virginia state forces shortly thereafter. He later was the commander of the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia (that fought only in Virginia and

Pennsylvania and maybe a little bit of Maryland, so he stayed true to his principles that he would only defend his state), and still later, General-in-Chief of all Confederate forces. By the way, this man, who was probably the chief adversary of the Union Armies (as they would look at it) was granted a full amnesty in 1868, just three years after the war.

Most people fail to realize that, except for his eldest daughter, Mary, the whole Lee family was pro-Union. But they were more loyal to Virginia and more loyal to the family ties they had in Virginia, and so he went to Virginia.

What were his views on secession? These are his own words in a letter:

The South, in my opinion, has been aggrieved by the acts of the North, as you say. I feel the aggression, and am willing to take every proper step for redress. *It is the principle I contend for*, not individual or private benefit. As an American citizen, I take great pride in my country, her prosperity and institutions, and would defend any State if her rights were invaded. But I can anticipate no greater calamity for the country than a dissolution of the Union. It would be an accumulation of all the evils we complain of, and I am willing to sacrifice everything but honor for its preservation. I hope, therefore, that all constitutional means will be exhausted before there is a resort to force. Secession is nothing but revolution.

Robert E. Lee's words on secession. He was very much against it.

He held no slaves himself, and when his father-in-law died and his wife inherited slaves, he freed them. His views on slavery, from an 1856 letter to his wife, were as follows: "In this enlightened age, there are few, I believe, but what will acknowledge that slavery as an institution is a moral & political evil in any Country. It is useless to expatiate [expound, elaborate] on its disadvantages."

He wrote in another instance: "There is a terrible war coming, and these young men who have never seen war cannot wait for it to happen, but I tell you, I wish that I owned every slave in the South, for I would free them all to avoid this war."

A Georgia politician, Benjamin Harvey Hill, described his character this way in an 1874 speech:

He was a foe without hate; a friend without treachery; a soldier without cruelty; a victor without oppression, and a victim without murmuring. He was a public officer without vices; a private citizen without wrong; a neighbor without reproach; a Christian without hypocrisy, and a man without guile. He was a Caesar, without his ambition; Frederick, without his tyranny; Napoleon, without his selfishness, and Washington, without his reward.

It is a shame (and ironic) that Leftists are using a man of near-irreproachable character—one who opposed secession and slavery—to symbolize those very things. But he was on the wrong side of history, as the progressives like to say, so they excoriate him, though he has been dead for nearly a century and a half.

It reminds me of what is said in the book of Amos about digging up the bones of the other side's king and burning them, just for spite. If they can do this to Robert E. Lee, a man of noble character among carnal human beings, they can do it to anyone, dead or alive.

It gives me pause, thinking that governments and mobs did a similar thing to Jesus and the apostles while they were alive. It did not matter to those mobs and to those governments what kind of men they were—noble, upstanding, righteous, godly. It did not matter. All that mattered was that they stood on the other side of the prevailing ideas and beliefs of the day. They did not take anything about them personally into account. They were just wrong because they believed something different.

Right now, the clashes we are seeing are political, but because they have a moral quality to them—a moral underpinning—they could quickly turn religious and embroil us in them. It is no wonder that Paul urges us in I Timothy 2:1-2 to pray “for all men, for kings, and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.”