

# Perilous Times Part 3: The Cancer in all Human Relationships

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Following the evils of self-love, the apostle lists ten more evils, all of which are about relationships between people. A prominent feature of any perilous time is that of relationship wickedness. Once people choose to despise the authority of Almighty God, they soon despise all authority outside themselves, and renounce all obligation, duty or debt to others if it conflicts with their own interests and lusts. (This is the core spirit of post-modernism.)

It is not surprising that periods of intense atheism should produce such behaviour. If the first five evil traits listed in Paul's prophecy are aspects of self-love, then the next ten traits are the inevitable consequence. Nor is it surprising that evangelism is so difficult. How hard it is to touch people with the tender themes of the Gospel when they become as hard as the picture given here.

It is important to remember that this list also points to sins which we should mention in our evangelism. It is not enough for a preacher to limit his 'sin list' to drink, drugs and fornication, when the Bible mentions so many evils, both in this passage and elsewhere.

## Despising of parents

The relationship evils begin with the term 'disobedient to parents'. Paul speaks here of the coming of times in which people will have no respect for those who properly possess seniority, whether literal parents, social or professional leaders, or any other legitimate holders of office or authority. In perilous times people feel no obligation to respect or obey anyone, recognising only their own self-determination. Is this not exactly the spirit of this age?

Churches are in very grave danger when their members begin to copy this attitude from the world, losing all regard for God's order in the church. However, it is happening everywhere that Christians reject counsel, guidance and the approval of their church in order to do whatever they like. Once again, the website scene provides many examples of self-opinionated 'preachers' and guides who have never been recognised, appointed or spiritually supported by their congregation (nor would be in so many cases).

## Unthankfulness

The second item on Paul's list of relationship evils is unthankfulness, or the failure to realise that anything is owed to others. The disloyalty at every level of modern life is only possible because of proud ingratitude. Parents are discarded and ignored by those who owe them so much. Husbands abandon wives, and wives leave husbands, utterly forgetful and heedless of how much at one time each may have given the other.

A conceited age is an unthankful age, in which self-centred minds believe that whatever they have received is their minimum right, and no gratitude or affection is due. If parents, spouse, friends, or anyone else should offer criticism, then they are promptly regarded as objectionable. Horrible traits appear in perilous times because the prevailing atheism is not only evil, but it works evil in the hearts of the people, producing a perverted, twisted society.

The greatest tragedy is when we see this ingratitude appearing in the churches of Christ. Imagine how it appears from Heaven, when people, often young people, saved and nurtured in a particular church and given countless priceless blessings (including, perhaps, their life's partner), stalk out in pride and resentment because of some small difficulty or admonition! Harsh words may be poured out against the church where those believers were cared for and prayed for by loving Chris-

ians who bore with their immaturities, showed them much patience and love, and encouraged and helped them along the path of faith.

Pastors often lament such things in this perilous time, observing that those who go away have learned ingratitude and disloyalty from society at large, rather than learning gratitude from the people of God. The world says that only 'number one' matters, and that is the philosophy which took over their hearts.

People are unthankful in every age, but never so much as in perilous times. In the past, when society was more starkly divided into the very rich, the middle classes and the oppressed poor, the latter, the 'have-nots', would manifest amazing gratitude for whatever came down to them. Today, by contrast, though most have plenty, it is all viewed as ours by right, and the idea of being grateful produces resentment.

The people of God should refuse to be shaped by surrounding culture, remembering that thankfulness to God is one of the chief pillars of a believer's obedience and assurance. Do our young people manifest thankfulness, appreciation and loyalty, or are they spoiled by the church with a diet of recreation? In many a fellowship young believers are offered pleasure rather than service, which is the very worst training for spiritual living in perilous times.

## **Unholiness**

Unholiness is the next evil named in Paul's prophecy. This does not refer to unholiness in a general sense, for it nestles among a list of wrongs in human relationships, and therefore refers to unholy relationships. These are to be expected when atheism rules, for if people do not believe in God or think they are accountable to him, why should they submit to the rules attributed to him? Surely all that matters is the individual's personal happiness. What is the covenant of marriage to an atheist who is consumed by self-love? As soon as he ceases to be totally thrilled and excited by it, and trials come along, he no longer finds it worth preserving, and feels free to walk out of it. Being a law unto himself, he has no great obligation to wife or children, especially when he finds that marriage imposes burdens and restrictions upon his liberty and lusts.

A season of extreme evil produces contempt for all God's ordained rules for relationships, not only marriage but also the prohibition of intimate relations before marriage, and the prohibition of 'vile affections' between members of the same sex.

Every age is not the same in its level of sinfulness. In perilous times forms of immorality are officially approved, legalised, encouraged, assisted, applauded and protected. The listed evils seize the hearts of the people to a far greater degree than in any other age. What can we do to protect the churches, and to rescue the young from ideas promoted in schools and by the entire entertainment industry?

It is a time for special fear and concern for training young converts to honour with sincere loyalty all the bonds ordained by God. We certainly need to warn about the unguarded culture of today in encouraging highly tactile behaviour across the sexes in social interaction, and also intimate counselling across the sexes. The new culture is designed for sexual excitement and liberty, and this urgently needs to be recognised.

## **'Without natural affection'**

The next ugly feature of human relationships in an age of apostasy is that very many people to an increasing degree become without natural affection, or unfeeling and unsympathetic. Obviously if people become dominated by self-love and feel no gratitude, and if they lose respect and loyalty to God-given family bonds, then they will become heartless people whose only affection will be toward those who currently benefit or excite them in some way. Deep and loyal love will become rare.

We see how people today behave in so many marital disputes, and particularly in their ruthless in

indifference to their children. We see the ever spiralling abortion statistics. Is this not an abnormally callous generation? One of the most awful fruits of atheism so widely seen in these perilous times is women who have had their natural maternal tenderness turned into a heartless, callous readiness to destroy life.

We must keep this satanic hardness of heart out of our churches, by calling for love for God, for one another, and for the lost. And such love cannot survive or grow without being exercised and expressed in acts of practical service. The church with no great outreach efforts, soon becomes a community for self-love where people are only concerned about their own hurts, and only cry about their own difficulties. A baneful procession of supposedly Christian psychological writers make their money stoking the fires of self-concern, but we are to reject these ungodly trends, and do all we can to encourage instead the unselfish, outgoing, loving Christianity of Christ. Why should the world shape the church?

The apostle goes on to speak of trucebreakers – disagreeable, unreliable people who will not enter into or keep faith with settlements of disputes. You cannot negotiate with them or trust them. They are irreconcilable. Paul mentions false accusers, or slanderers and gossips. He mentions those who are incontinent or without self-control, including fierce or violent people. He refers to people who despise the well-behaved, viewing them with contempt. He speaks of traitors or betrayers, and spitefulness is certainly common in today's atheistic society. Paul also lists the heady, or headstrong and overconfident; the high-minded, meaning literally enveloped in smoke (or conceit); and those who are lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God.

All these traits take over in a perilous time, ruling secular society and also ruling the world of nominal religion. (For this reason alone ecumenism is a disaster for true churches.) The apostle therefore warns about people – 'having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.' Our confidence is that God gives more grace, according to our need, and he will preserve and keep his vigilant people.

The apostle's prophetic analysis of perilous times has proved harrowingly accurate, and serves as a powerful vindication of the inspired accuracy of revelation. Nothing is happening which we have not been told to expect, because all is known to our God. The world does not understand itself, but we understand it, and why it desperately needs the saving message of Christ.

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